FOR THE LEAST OF THESE: PLANTING A FIVE STARWELCOMING CONGREGATION

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ABSTRACT

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This project was designed to plant a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. This project discovered: why the church has lost its connection as a hospitable place of worship; the response of the people and pulpit to this matter, and how to retain a five-star excellence approach to hospitality. To triangulate this data; a qualitative pretest and posttest questionnaire was administered, focus group sessions were conducted and sermons preached. From the findings, participants understood the urgency to plant a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been completed without the aid and assistances of my mentors, Reverend Dr. William H. Curtis and Reverend Dr. Gina M. Stewart; thank you for your guidance, insight and encouragement along this journey. To my peers in the Curtis-Stewart group, thanks for the intimate times we have shared together. To my professional associates, Reverend Dr. Darron D. McKinney, Sr., Reverend Dr. Valerie Bridgeman, and Reverend Dr. Kent Hall, thank you for your persistence, dedication, expertise, and loving encouragement to push me to complete this project.

To my initial context associates at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc., Elder Davin D. Clemons, Ms. Gwendolyn Clemons, Deacon Dennis Allen, Overseer Keith Jones of All Nations Assembly and Taryn Haley, thank you for agreeing to partner with me on this project and the invaluable information you so graciously shared with me.

To my current context associates at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc., thank you for agreeing to alter your schedules at such a short time to ensure that this project warrants completion. To Reverend Dr. Donnell Moore and Sherri Knight, thank you for your critical but cautious editorial opinions given to make this project successful. Your assistance allowed me to finally complete this project.

To one of the best friends for life, Elder Davin D. Clemons, you have worked diligently in assisting me in this project and to making this dream become a reality in my pursuit of higher education and justice. It is through your support and faith in me that

pressing toward the goal as the Apostle Paul expresses in Philippians 3:14 (NIV) was possible. You helped to see that this project was completed through your prayers, support understanding, patience and constructive criticism. Forever indebtedness is mine because of your steadfast loyalty and love exhibited in my life and ministry.

To my mother, siblings, grandparents and family, thanks for supporting and believing in the higher academic standards set for my success. Your unwavering love helped motivated me in my striving to preach and teach the word of God with unconditional love for all of the children of God. You are the reason remaining in the fight and taking a stand for what is right is possible.

To my pastor, Reverend Dr. James L. Netters and the Mount Vernon Baptist Church, thank you for allowing me to serve in ministry and nurturing me as one of your sons in the Gospel ministry. Dr. Netters, you have been a great inspiration and support to me.

To Bishop Charles E. Cartwright and the Mount Gilead Ministries, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to be a part of your church family. To Bishop O. C. Allen, pastor of the Vision Church of Atlanta and Presiding Prelate of the United Progressive Pentecostal Church, thanks for your spiritual guidance, influence, unconditional love, encouragement, and mentoring me in starting a church ministry for the least of these. And to the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis family, thanks for allowing this project to be implemented and completed. Thanks for your continued love and support and for seeking change in the church that will empower the people of God.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all of those who have experienced inhospitality while in church. Mistreatment, feeling unwanted and being made to feel like an outcast have all been experience first hand. Thanks to Almighty God that this project has become a ray of hope for those who want to feel like they are a part of the Body of Christ.

INTRODUCTION

The church has drifted from being the *Whosoever will let them come* church to becoming a more segregated religious institution. It seems as if the church surveys individuals by allowing people to be a part based upon certain criteria. A number of churches emphasize hospitality and welcoming and accepting all people; on the other hand, the reality is not true in a number of churches.

The church has been given a challenge and task to draw souls to Christ as given by the Great Commission, but the church cannot do as the Great Commission mandates if the church only caters to a specific people. Therefore, the challenge for the church is to redefine and recapture its mission to include all persons, and to make it the fundamental principle to which the pulpit holds each person accountable to how one another is treated. This task is a responsibility that everyone in the context has.

For The Least Of These: Planting A Welcoming Five Star Congregation is the premise of this ministry project. Since the church's inception, hospitality has been a significant part of the church's establishment of friendship, love, acceptance, support, fellowship, and relaxation and refreshment. Exhibiting hospitality was a necessity, especially for those individuals who were attempting to establish a bond or connection.

Inhospitality has created tension in the church and among church leaders and laity because of a skewed perspective of faith and their obligation to those who make up the beloved community in which the church and its leaders are called to witness. The church

and its leaders have not done true social justice and prophetic witness, especially if certain people are left out of the equation while other individuals are included. Therefore, this ministry project is committed to the biblical, historical and theological elements of prophetic preaching.

This ministry project will discover 1) The reasons the church is no longer considered a hospitable place of worship; 2) The response of the people and the pulpit to this matter; and 3) How to retain the five-star excellence approach in extending hospitality to everyone. These challenging questions are provocative and stimulating. Through this project, it is hoped that transformation will occur within the context, altering the mindsets and behaviors of the members toward a radical change in congregational hospitality.

This ministry project uses Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc., Memphis, Tennessee as a case study to examine prophetic ministry. The Cathedral of Praise is a newly organized church that is creating tension in both the religious and community sectors simply because of its stance in the preachment area of social justice. As a new pastor, providing congregational hope and inspiration is often difficult, especially when members have experienced the church hurt. Thus, Cathedral of Praise has been called to remove abuse and improve the way the church embrace people in ministry.

Chapter one encompasses the Ministry Focus and it captures the spiritual autobiography and ministry context. From these two entities, the project's synergy is birthed. Included in this chapter is the researcher's formative years and how it has prepared him for formational ministry. The church has been a place of restoration and

refuge for him during his time of pain and distress. For the researcher, the church has been a place where the people gathered in the pews to addressed problems that concerned everyone. Thus, the dichotomy between the Cathedral of Praise Church and the community comes together to bridge the gap to address and find a remedy to the issue of inhospitality, especially for the least of these.

Chapter two, State of the Art in this Ministry Model, examines the pertinent literature, and ministry models pertaining to this particular art of preachment. The summarizations and explorations from these sources exhibit its connection to this project. In this distinctive area of the project, the individual ministry, corporate ministry model and scholarly literature are provided. These sources of information give desirable results, knowledge and practical application as it relate to this art of preachment.

Chapter three, Theoretical Foundations, gives a general summation of the theoretical foundations to this project. The Old Testament book of Genesis presents the expression of hospitality and the treatment of strangers as themes to the culture of this book. In the New Testament book of John, a thorough description of how Jesus calls Christians to a new ideology surrounding hospitality is explored. The historical foundation provides evidence of the role of hospitality during early Christianity; it also explains why hospitality became a top priority. The theological foundations include theological debates from Karl Barth's *Deliverance to the Captives* and James Cone's need of Black theology. Although both scholars have different theological perspectives, they each invite people to overcome oppression by way of hospitality.

Chapter four, Methodology, provide survey questions, the outline for focus group sessions and sermon listening sessions as treatment for this ministry model. The method of collecting the data and data analysis are presented in this section as well.

Chapter five gives an account of the Field Experience, the journey and the outcomes of the eight-week project. It also provides evidence of growth from the project facilitator and the congregation. The measurements and analysis from the pre and post surveys, project participants background information, lecture feedback and final interview from some participants is provided in this chapter.

Chapter six is the final division of this project that lists the Reflection, Summary, and Conclusion. It captures areas of reflections, evaluations, and summary of the researcher's ministry project. In this chapter, we offer what has been learned, offers thoughts for further study and discusses the overall growth from designing, implementing, and analyzing this project.

In the appendix, supporting documentation for this project can be located.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Spiritual Journey

Darnell Gooch, Jr. was born on March 21, 1981 in Memphis, Tennessee to Bernita L. McKinney and Darnell Gooch, Sr. He is the eldest of two other siblings, Pastor Darron D. McKinney and Darnita D. Gooch. Although he and his siblings shared the same parents, he did not have the ideal family setting like some of his peers. His parents were not married. He and his siblings lived with their mother in a single parent home. In this home, their mother, maternal grandmother, and a number of aunts reared the children. As a child, his immediate family lived under the same roof with his grandmother, Arverline P. Harper, his mother's sisters, Cherylene McKinney and Sharon A. Hall, and cousin(s) in a duplex that had only one bedroom, living room, bath and kitchen.

Darnell's family lived in the middle of South Memphis across from the Foote Holmes and Clayborne Holmes housing projects. These housing projects as well as other parts of the South Memphis area were considered by many as the ghetto. Many of his mother's relatives lived near or in the area close by. Although, his family lived near the housing projects, Darnell's family did not want him or his other siblings and relatives to be a recipient of the violence stemming from the ghetto. The generations before Darnell and his siblings attended the historically Black high school in that area, which was

Booker T. Washington or B. T. W. as it is often called. No one else in his immediate family, along with the cousin(s) with whom Darnell was raised were educated at Booker T. Washington during that time except his grandmother, mother, and aunts because of the onset of integration.

Since he was the firstborn in the family, Darnell was given his father's full name to carry on the legacy. The relationship that Darnell's father had with his children was that of absentee parent. The absence of Darnell's father played a tremendous role in the maturity and growth of Darnell and his siblings. There were times growing up that Darnell and his siblings wanted to have their father in the home, but since his father was a no show, this created some tension in how Darnell and his siblings were reared. But, what Darnell's mother and grandmother always told him and his siblings was to always love their father. This unconditional love Darnell and his siblings had for their father were due to being raised in a Christian environment. It was an unconditional love that Darnell and his siblings learned in Sunday school and Bible study from 1 John 4:19. This type of love enabled Darnell and his siblings to forgive and love their father because God first loved them. Darnell and his siblings were able to exhibit the concept of God-based love for their father due to God's Word and living out what the Word of God teaches.

Given that his mother only had a partial college education and his father had only a high school degree, Darnell and his siblings vowed to pursue excellence by staying in school and attending higher institutions of learning in order to have a better life than what their parents had. The family was middle-class working people who struggled to make ends meet to provide for their household and, as the household grew larger in numbers, so did the needs. To keep a close-knit relationship and family unit, his family lived

together for the majority of his life; in fact, over a period of time, Darnell and his brother were the only males living in the house with nine females.

Darnell's lineage can be traced from the roots of his maternal great-grandfather. His great-grandfather was the kind of guy who was stern, but would do anything to preserve, protect, and love his family. This type of tenacity was passed down to Darnell's maternal grandmother, and she was very influential in passing it on to generations that followed. Most families would agree that it is a family's responsibility to retain its legacy. The legacy of Darnell's maternal great-grandfather was a heritage that had a stern belief in God. After Darnell's maternal great-grandfather passed away, his grandmother retained the family's legacy by making sure the family was actively involved in the life of the church. Even when Darnell's family was not at church, his family was gathered together at a relative's house worshipping in some way. The Word of God, as his grandmother knew it, was one that was spirit-filled with unconditional love, and liberating tranquility. Not all individuals and/or families will experience this kind of Gospel, especially if it is not Christ-driven in the legacy of the family.

His family was not always at its best. However, they were committed to keeping family ties and making sure that being a family was important. If one relative was without and was in need the family would pitch in to make sure that relative did not go without. The love that his family had for each other was very inspirational to other families that attended the same church. The faith Darnell's family believed in was found in their ability to love one another as well as in their desire to see one another achieve and succeed.

Darnell's family was not the typical television family portrayed on some of the regularly scheduled sitcoms whereby the family's makeup is that of a father, mother, children, grandparents, and the family's dog. In fact, Darnell's immediate family was the total opposite. This was a difficult feeling—a feeling like no other, especially when you wanted your father to be in your life, and he was nowhere to be found. Darnell wanted to be like the fathers and sons in other families and have his father show up at school for father and son events, but when he looked around, his dad was never there. Although Darnell's dad would sometimes show up, it was not enough to fill the void in their lives. The only time his children would hear from him was maybe on birthdays and holidays. These were good days because hearing from him, even on those special days, was rare.

Just having his father's last name was not only what Darnell wanted, but he wanted his dad to be someone who he call his role model. However, Darnell could not truthfully say that he was proud of his father—especially knowing that his father willfully walked away from his children. In fact, there was no father figure, and the only people Darnell and his siblings could rely were their mother, grandmother and God. There was no support, love, money, or guidance.

What a terrible way to feel—not knowing whether or not your father really cares enough to show up for important events in life. Sometimes, his children would cry and exhibit behavior that their mother did not understand. As a single parent raising three children, Darnell's mother struggled trying to find a place to lay their heads. Imagine living in the ghetto fighting off mice and roaches or wearing the same clothes as your siblings. Can you fathom hand-washing clothes with soap in a tub because your family could not afford a washing machine? What about sleeping in the same bunk bed, two at

the top and two at the bottom? Lastly, how about eating a meal consisting of bread and milk because of limited resources.

Even with the help of her mother and her two sisters, Darnell's mother had to struggle, doing the best she could to raise two boys and a girl—showing them how to count, how to say their alphabet, and tucking them into bed at night. She had a dual role as both mother and father. She was the breadwinner, and, wherever there was something lacking, she tried to make up for it. What Darnell realized in this struggle was that God loved him even beyond the lack of resources. His central Christian understanding of God was that Jehovah is a loving God; whose love was not based on his absentee father or the non-materialistic things that he did not have growing up as a child. Moreover, it was a love that flowed from the deepest parts of Yahweh's character.

Even though times were tough, Darnell's family worked and tried to make enough money to live a middle class lifestyle. There were times, however, when it seemed as though they were poor despite all their hard work. Pearl, as his grandmother has always been affectionately known, has always been a woman who made sure that a negative stigma did not plague her family. Pearl toiled daily to find something for her hands to do. She was matriarch and glue that held the family together and made sure that her ancestry was in church. Pearl exhibited the same affection at home that she showed when laboring with the Saints doing ministry at church.

Darnell's mother learned to call on God knowing that God would provide. Once Darnell had learned about the God of his grandmother and mother, the same God became the central in his life as well, even at very young age. It was in 1986, on a Sunday night at his home church at Mount Vernon Baptist Church-Westwood in Memphis, Tennessee

where Darnell accepted Christ into his life. His senior pastor, the Reverend Dr. James L. Netters, Sr., preached a powerful message of hope that even Darnell, who was at the tender age of five, was able to understand. There was nothing more central to Reverend Netters' message of Christian faith than the preaching and teaching of the cross. Darnell's understanding of the cross revealed Christ as an act of unselfish, gracious love to all of humanity. His message taught Darnell that Christians are to be loving persons replicating the love of God.

After he had officially joined the family of God, Darnell became active in church. At that time, Darnell was a part of the children's church, which was designed to teach the children of the church about God. His most influential youth advisor was Mrs. Christine Wells who imparted a love of learning in the children. Mrs. Wells committed herself to the children and based upon her willingness to be dedicated to the Christian call, Darnell took on the same Christian devotion as he got older. Darnell took on the charismatic leadership as Mrs. Wells, who was very passionate about her work and the spiritual growth of the children and youth.

Mrs. Wells was one who constantly pushed Darnell and other youth and young adults to the forefront. As a guidance counselor, Mrs. Wells valued the time that she spent nurturing them into being the future leaders of the church and society. The fact that she made sure they were involved and engaged in duties of the church helped to shape their Christian lifestyle today. Darnell shares this spiritual boldness as one of his strengths in ministry today.

Mrs. Wells had a special love for Darnell and his brother. She envisioned them in the preaching ministry and it later came into fruition. She would always call them her

other sons, since she helped to spiritually nurture and foster them as future church leaders. It was her love for him that Darnell stayed steadfast in the faith, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Challenging Childhood Darkness

As a babe in Christ, Darnell began to experience some unwarranted pain in his childhood that would later haunt him and his family. Darnell's mother met a married man with whom she would later fall in love with. To her, he was the epitome of a man that she never had. She was assured that he was the picture perfect gentleman. However, her dream man was very difficult, conflicted, and often violent, who abused drugs and alcohol.

This challenging and dark period for Darnell and his family prompted Darnell to be more vocal, stronger, and more faithful to God. The violence Darnell saw and experienced eventually yielded more of a loving response to the body of Christ. He vowed to never exhibit hurt that would destroy the psychological, social, and spiritual manifested destiny of the believer. From this experience, Darnell learned that God was still in this experience similar to when God was with His Son, Jesus, on the cross to Calvary. It was a commitment like no other that assured Darnell as the scripture said, "And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20, NLT).

Darnell's grandmother kept her daughter and grandchildren lifted up before the Lord in prayer. The power of prayer became so overwhelming that God's love began to shine and be recognized in their lives. Although God's love never left him, Darnell felt like it did, but, ultimately, God would not let it be so.

A Tug of War

Dr. Lulah Hedgeman, who was the former Director of Choral Activities at Overton High School, did not know the divine influence she had on Darnell's life. She led and taught her award-winning students to be the best and keep God first in whatever they did. Under the tutelage of Mrs. Hedgeman, Darnell's choir family gave him a sense of belonging that he had never felt before. From this essential relationship, Darnell was able to develop musical skills and talents as well as a family bond with friends that would later help to heal his past wounds. Darnell never really got a chance to tell Mrs. Hedgeman how much he appreciated her austere style of rigor because she had passed away in 1998. Mrs. Hedgeman's death was devastating news to Darnell and Overton High School, especially the Overton choir since she was a loving mother to so many of her students. Her demise as well as other events prompted Darnell's life to become more indebted to the Lord.

At the age of eighteen, God spoke to him concerning ministry. Once the decision was made to totally surrender to God, Darnell accepted his call to ministry. Accepting his call was a tug of war with God, which, ultimately, resulted in God emerging as the winner. There were several reasons this was such a tug of war for Darnell. One reason being he was still young in age. Another reason was because Darnell did not feel like giving up the life he was living to become a preacher. Darnell felt like being a preacher would make him more of a square. However, God took charge over his life, and there was no turning back. The road became harder, but he knew that God was able to keep him and give him strength that was more than enough to stay on the battlefield.

Dr. Netters became his father in the ministry. As babes in Christ and newly licensed ministers, Pastor Netters gave Darnell and his brother an opportunity to preach their first sermon together in 1999. On the day of the evening service that they were licensed, the people packed the church and they wanted to hear the Harper boys or McKinney boys, as sometimes they were affectionately called, preach with profound power and authority. The last name Harper was his maternal grandmother's last name and McKinney was the last name of his maternal grandfather. As children growing up in the church, Darnell's family was probably the majority of the people in the church and people respected them greatly.

Darnell did not realize how serious the ministry really was until he was a candidate for ordination. Dr. Netters' confidence in Darnell and his brother caused them to excelling in ordination preparation class. Darnell was no stranger to the lessons being taught in the class since he and his brother were already enrolled at the Memphis Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tennessee. Deacon Wallace Calhoun made sure that the candidates were absolutely ready for the catechism because he constantly challenged the class to read and study the Bible. To Darnell and his brother, the catechism was a breeze, but simultaneously, it brought butterflies. But, what has pushed Darnell to excel is Dr. Netters' favorite scripture, which says, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13, NIV).

Philippians 4:13 became one of Darnell's favorite adoptive scriptures. Darnell kept this passage of scripture as a reminder that he could do all things through Christ. It was during the laying on of hands by those already ordained that Darnell really felt the

power of God like never before. It was an amazing, breath-taking and yet a fearful experience not knowing what was lying.

With the assistance of being active in many ministries, Darnell's peers helped him because they did not want to see him fail. Their constant prayers, along with his own, were the catalysts to his spiritual growth. It was as if God had taken total control over his life. The Lord had given him a new language to speak which ultimately spoke into the lives of many who were a part of his ministries. This was very inspirational and empowering to him for realizing that his Christian journey could help someone along the way as they started a new walk with Christ.

His Christian journey was a path that included not only Darnell being in the ministry, but in the field of law enforcement for almost twelve years. As a police officer in the City of Memphis, Darnell was able to share the Word of God to individuals that he came in contact with as a police officer. Encountering the police by society's standards was not a positive attribute, however, this was not the mentality that Darnell wanted to portray. While on patrol, Darnell was not only a public servant but also a witness for Christ. In his witnessing, Darnell led hardcore criminals to Christ. He shares the violent family life he experienced to criminals and how God's love has prevails. Darnell and his colleagues, who are also in ministry, have helped to re-establish the police chaplaincy program, which offers spiritual aid to officers and their families during critical incidents. The efforts of his devoted acts prominently expose his affection throughout his community as he fights crime. He has often been recognized as a great humanitarian by his colleagues for his efforts in giving back to his community. He has worked alongside

other police officers in feeding families, providing clothes, toys, and etc., in his precinct's community where he patrols during Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Darnell has devoted himself as a volunteer chaplain at the Regional Medical Center hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. At The Med, as the hospital is often called, Darnell prides himself in spending time with the patients by praying and reading the Word of God with those who accepts the invitation. Not only is Darnell concerned with the wellbeing of the patient, but he is more concerned with their spiritual welfare as well. The patient being in right standing with God is more important to Darnell more than anything. If not, then Darnell believes that offering the patient pastoral care is most substantial, which is a part of his ministry.

Ministry work in the church was not difficult for Darnell. In fact, it has always been exciting to him, and he has always approached it enthusiastically. One main reason is because he was raised in the church; secondly, his family was expected to be involved in the life of the church. If they were not involved, his grandmother would make sure to take the appropriate measures to make sure they would be. Darnell's grandmother influenced him and other relatives to become mostly active in the choir. His leadership roles in the choir forced the choir members to respectfully call him as their ministerial leader of the choir.

Over the course of time, as the church membership began to grow from some 300 to 4,500 members, there was a need for new ministries to be formed at Mount Vernon. The ministries that were assigned to his hands were the Young Adult Ministry, Single's Ministry, Young Adult choir, and the Young Adult Sunday school. Occasionally, his assistance would be needed in the Children, Youth ministry, and Choir ministries to help

his brother who was the Children's/Youth Pastor at that time. A spiritual and physical bond had developed over the course of his tenure there at the church. As their ministerial leader, they shared many tears and times of laughter together. The needs of the youth and young adults began to change as and this particular category of people needed someone who could be transparent as well as relate to them. Darnell and his brother were those individuals who were chosen to head those ministries. The Young Adult Ministry began to become more involved in the life of the church by being actively involved in Christian Education, liturgy, worship, church administration and outreach activities. There was a spiritual empowerment that was manifested over the Young Adult Ministry as a result of his leadership. The minds of the Young Adult and Singles' Ministry were enhanced, and the worship experience was even more personal as a daily routine in their lives.

This spiritual experience that the Young Adults and Singles exhibited during service was instrumental in the lives of the other Saints who attended church. The authenticity exhibited from the Young Adults and Singles' Ministry spiritually motivated the older seasonal Saints to reanalyze their personal commitment to God in being a servant-leader. It motivated other Saints to catch the vision, fulfill the mission, and make the transition. All auxiliaries and ministries under his leadership gained strength in their prayer life. They learned to acknowledge and understand the power of fasting and praying. These groups did a phenomenal job in carrying out the task of doing outreach and evangelistic work by feeding and clothing the homeless, praying and singing carols to children stricken with cancer, ministering to abusive individuals and those who were in prison. Through critical observation of these ministries in which he oversees, Darnell has discovered that these ministries have taken on the same spirit of love and prayer life as

Darnell has adopted in his own personal life. The Young Adult Ministry and Singles' Ministry discovered ways to meet the needs of the people, and they developed a relationship with those in the community in order to reach them spiritually. This has been indeed an affirmation of the prophetic calling.

A Tough Decision

It was in the fall of 2009, while singing in the young adult choir at his home church that God had been speaking to him in a strange way. His spirit was uneasy and mind was baffled concerning this difficult calling. Darnell sought for answers by praying and worshipping God in hopes that God would reveal the mystery. One Sunday morning while driving to his home church, something usual happened. Darnell's vision became temporarily blurred while driving. Although, Darnell was physically driving his truck, God was in total control. Once Darnell's vision became clear again, he noticed that he was not at his home church.

God drove Darnell to Mount Gilead Ministries at 3997 Willowview Avenue in Memphis, Tennessee. It was at that moment that God instructed Darnell to leave his home church of twenty-eight years. He made the toughest decision ever besides his acceptance into the ministry and that was to leave his family's church and join Mount Gilead Ministries. He knew nothing about this strange land that he was in, but, after the senior pastor, the Bishop Charles E. Cartwright, was done preaching and the challenge was given during the invitation, somehow Darnell ended up on his knees at the altar weeping.

Darnell remained baffled regarding why God told him to join another church, but out of obedience, Darnell did it. This new contextual setting was a new charismatic

renewal for Darnell since it had a Pentecostal background compared to his former home church, which did not. Darnell begin to experience a more spontaneous outpouring of the Holy Spirit here at Mount Gilead Ministries. To him, it was a new birth experience all over again. Being baptized in the Holy Spirit through the evidence of speaking in tongues was an experience that continued to give Darnell spiritual power as well as an inner cleansing. To Darnell, the evidence of speaking in tongue was a spiritual impartation given to him so that he could be more apt to proclaim evangelization. Darnell became an advocate for expressive worship and praise at Mount Gilead Ministries, which included shouting and dancing. This expressive worship and praise allowed him to overcome spiritual obstacles and attacks that began to come with his increasing anointing given to him by the Holy Spirit.

Since God had made love available to Darnell through his friends and colleagues who had some unpleasant church experiences, he has been inspired by the Holy Spirit to discover new approaches to theological practices and pastoral work for ministry in his new assignment as the proud pastor of the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, which Darnell founded in August 2012. In his fasting and praying, God has been speaking to him on numerous occasions to create, nurture, and develop support for visionary leadership. On separate accounts, Darnell and many of his family members and friends envisioned a diverse church that was being birth to help individuals who were thirsting after righteousness. Darnell begin to seek God in prayer for direction concerning his vision of a place of refuge for those who wanted to establish and restore their relationship back with God. He began to meet with ministers and laypersons to begin building the foundation to his new assignment.

As a result, Darnell is a uniquely gifted, creative, and profound orator. He is highly sought after, charismatic, motivational preacher and speaker, and singer. He equips and empowers people to transform the world as Christ did when he turned the world upside down in his preaching and teaching. Known for his simple, practical, and sometimes egalitarian preaching style, Darnell has the ability to reach and relate to people of all diverse backgrounds. An ex-drug dealer has given up his violent lifestyle, accepted Christ and recently joined under Darnell's ministry. Darnell has also united Whites and Blacks into communal worship through praying and praising God simultaneously with different denominational backgrounds from Catholics, Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostals. He strives in his preaching and teaching to focus on emotional healing, restoring hope and the spiritual power of the believer.

Darnell is constantly praying for direction and guidance as he is progressively becoming a fervid crusader of Christ, which is an enterprise undertaken with zeal and enthusiasm. Due to Darnell's faithfulness to Christ, he has experienced phenomenal and unprecedented spiritual growth. His hermeneutical approach to prophetic preaching has exhibited authentic biblical exegesis for Christian teaching. His devotion to God has completely turned around. Waking up to the sound of prayer and praise has been one of Darnell's daily habits that start his morning each day. This is what gets him motivated for what lies ahead of him. Darnell knows inherently that early morning praying helps his day and it is when his ears are keen to hear from God. Early morning prayers keep Darnell safe as he protects the citizens in his law enforcement capacity as well as he stands up before his congregation to give a word of hope.

As a native Memphian, Darnell has experience in urban ministry, which has afforded him the ability to do ministry in his current parish at the Cathedral of Praise. As an evangelist, he has spread the Gospel locally and abroad with the hope of being an international preacher. His political and theological development over the span of years has motivated his ministry to challenge oppression, marginalization, spiritual and social impact that has left people feeling unwelcomed. It is Darnell's ultimate vision to see unwelcomed people become psychologically and spiritually liberated and embraced in order for them to be able to walk in their vocation.

After twelve years of being in the ministry, in 2012, Darnell envisioned the church as a safe haven where the Holy Spirit empowers all people regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class or background. So in 2012, Darnell is beginning to develop and train members utilizing the New Member Orientation manual of the Cathedral of Praise, which he helped to develop. Under his visionary leadership, Darnell is currently trying to further develop administrative policy and procedures for the Cathedral of Praise. Some of the enhancements Darnell is currently working on to bring the Cathedral of Praise into the modern era of technology advancement using computer software for membership profiles, incorporating a media ministry, and undertake a future project for increasing the building fund, and revitalizing the church's structure. But, his chief mission is soul winning.

Since his change in membership God has elevated him to Senior Pastor and he is continually learning to walk in his anointing. His love for ministry has impacted Darnell to great lengths so that he has been trying to implement what he has learned from his former churches and seminary training at the Cathedral of Praise. Learning from his

previous mentors who nurtured him in ministry, Darnell has been able to gain spiritual insight of what to do and what not to do in ministry. His twelve-year tenure in the ministry has equipped him with the experience and skills needed to further educate the church and impart biblical knowledge in order to enhance what is being established at the Cathedral of Praise. Darnell is empowering his ministers, lay leaders and congregation to reaching out to the oppressed, standing up for social concerns, and loving thy neighbors as thy self.

Context of Ministry

A Church of Praise, Power, and Progress

The writer's current parish setting, the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, was founded in August of 2012 by its current pastor. Under the guidance of their under-shepherd, the Elder Darnell Gooch, Jr., who is the senior pastor, he, along with his membership believes that this church has evolved to become a church of praise, power, and progress with a ministry geared toward ministering to the whole total man and woman right where the individual is in his or her life. This ecclesiastical institution reaches out to those who are wounded and to those who are lost and in despair. There is a great deal of verbal, preached, and printed rhetoric that the Cathedral of Praise pursues to console and comfort those who have felt unwelcomed, unappreciated and unaccepted. The Cathedral of Praise wants to reach the lives of those who are downtrodden, confused, bound, and afflicted. As the pastor, Darnell knows how it feels to be unwelcomed due to his previous encounters at some point at his former churches and consequently, as an individual who has overcome such pain, it is Darnell's vision to preach healing back into the lives of people who have been felt abandoned and rejected. Being the loving pastor

that God has made him to be, Darnell and the Cathedral of Praise will earnestly endeavor to undergird its members and visitors in prayer that each individual may be healed, delivered, set free, and made to triumph in every place.

Memphis, the Mid-South

The Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, since newly organized, is worshipping out of the Double Tree Hotel located at 5069 Sanderlin Avenue in Memphis, Tennessee until the church is able to save money and purchase its own worship center. The City of Memphis is known for its great culture and rich history, as it relates to the Civil Rights Movement, the Bible belt, major thoroughfares for distribution, the Blues, Memphis In May Festivities, Elvis Presley's mansion, the place where the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, and even its public documentaries on crime and violence in the series on *MPD War on the Streets*, *The First 48* and *Police Women of Memphis*, etc. This city is home to many individuals who enjoy the history along with the smell and taste of barbeque and who are proud of their city. In a recent article, however, in the *Commercial Appeal*, a local newspaper in Memphis, Tom Charlier discusses several surprises regarding the most recent Census taken in 2010. It records Memphis' population at 646,889, which has dwindled by 3, 211 in 2000; however, Memphis still reigns as the largest city in Tennessee. Charlier quotes City Councilman Jim Strickland, who calls this diminishing numbers phenomenon a disturbing trend…and that the two main forces driving people from Memphis, are concerns about crime and poor schools.[1]

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[1]Tom Charlier, 2011. "Memphis lost more than 3,000 residents since 2000 Census." *Commercial Appeal*. March 16. http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2011/mar/16/memphis-population-dipped-3000-census-shows/?partner (accessed August 23, 2011).

However, Darnell plans to change this negative perception of a disturbing trend as Councilman Strickland called it by planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these as a church model and hopefully the City of Memphis can adopt it as a means to reach a community where crime is constantly affecting a Memphis community. To Darnell, Memphis has always been his home and for him to know that the city he lives in has a major crime issue really alarming especially in a city that is noted as the Bible Belt. As a Christian, this not only presents a problem Darnell as a citizen of Memphis, but it also becomes a current problem for the Cathedral of Praise where Darnell serves as pastor. Darnell believes that this makes his task much more difficult in trying to reach the underprivileged and disadvantaged masses in the city because of the inhospitality of the people in Memphis.

The current mayor of Memphis is A. C. Wharton, Jr. Wharton was elected in 2011 as the second Black mayor of Memphis. However, Dr. Willie W. Herenton, the first Black mayor of Memphis, was the longest serving Black mayor for seventeen years. He recently resigned his tenure in 2009 and City Councilman chairman, Myron Lowery, served as Mayor Pro Tem for less than three months. Also as Chairman of the City Council, Bishop J. O. Patterson, Jr., became mayor for twenty-days when Wyatt Chandler, former mayor, resigned in 1988. What is significant about these distinguished gentlemen is the fact that each person has pride themselves as public servants in representing the Black community and or some Memphians and Blacks, like Darnell, depend upon the political leadership in the city to help make decisions for the betterment of society.

Memphis is located in the southwestern region of Shelby County, Tennessee along the Mississippi River. It is often referred to as the Mid-South. To this date, Shelby County is 784 square miles[2] and according to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were 897,472 people, 338,366 households, and 228,735 families residing in Shelby County.[3] In 2005, Shelby County was home to 1,821 same-sex households, the most reported in the state, according to the 2000 census data. That number does not include same sex couples who live alone or with someone who is not their partner.[4] Same sex couples represent another demographic that needs special attention in the Memphis community especially since there are no non-discrimination clauses listed in the City Ordinance to address discrimination issues and violence against the same sex couples other than the federal hate crime laws. This shows a negative aspect of Black leadership in this city because some of Memphis' citizens are same sex couples.

Based on the Census report, Shelby County has become a majority Black county. 63.3% of the residents live in Memphis are Black and that 63.3% is equivalent to 409,687 Black people living in Memphis. On the other hand, the demographic ratio indicates that the Hispanic population is the next rising ethnic group[5] and since the Hispanic population is rising in Memphis there is a major obligation for the Cathedral of Praise to integrate its membership with diverse cultures and other ethnicities. Darnell has been in several

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[2]Shelby County, Tennessee, "A Brief History of Shelby County", http://www.shelbycountytn.gov (accessed February 10, 2012).

[3]Shelby County, Tennessee, "Demographics", http://www.shelbycountytn.gov (accessed February 10, 2012).

[4]Bianca Phillips, "Gays in Memphis", *Memphis Flyer*. http://www.memphisflyer.com (accessed February 10, 2012).

[5]Tom Charlier, "Memphis lost more than 3,000 residents since 2000 Census." *Commercial Appeal.* March 16. http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2011/mar/16/memphis-population-dipped-3000-census-shows/?partner (accessed August 23, 2011).

Hispanic communities in the city where many of the Hispanics have not been evangelized. It is believed that many of the younger generation moved to other cities to attend other colleges and universities and to search for better paying jobs. This is quite evident since the city and county governments are fighting for ways to keep jobs and bring larger and smaller businesses into the Memphis community to keep the younger generation in the city in hopes of moving the city forward in future endeavors.

Per the U. S. Census Bureau count dated in 2000, there were 27,562 Memphians who accounted for the 1999 below poverty level status. Single parent household with no presence of a husband accounted for 19,926 families. There is also a diverse cultural background of different races in Memphis, which includes 33.3% are White, 60.8% are Black or African American, 0.2% are American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.7% are Asian, 0.1% are Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 5.2% are Hispanic or Latino, and the other 3.9% are other races.[6] Also in 2002, approximately 2,000 people were homeless. These individuals were living in homeless shelters and permanent supportive housing for homeless people. At least 250 of those individuals were homeless men and women who slept on park benches, under bridges and viaducts, behind dumpsters, in doorways of businesses, nooks, crannies called cat holes.[7] These statistical and demographical studies is an indication to Darnell that there is a spiritual need for his church to go outside of the four walls of his ministry to embrace a more broader community of individuals who might need salvation, hope, and love.

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[6]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates-Data Profile Highlights: Memphis city, Tennessee.* http://www.factfinder.census.gov (accessed November 28, 2011).

[7]Pat Morgan, National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2002 *Memphis/Shelby County Mayor's Taskforce on Homelessness: Blueprint to Break the Cycle of Homelessness and Prevent Future Homelessness.* http://www.endhomelessness.org (accessed August 23, 2012).

The downtown area of Memphis is quite diverse with fun, food, entertainment and rapidly growing dynamic real estate. East Memphis is an economic powerhouse for commercial and residential settling due to its hustle and bustle of a somewhat big city in the Mid-South area. Hickory Hill area is culturally diverse along with middle class neighborhoods and prominent business ventures embellishing the area. Midtown/ Chickasaw Gardens have a heterogeneous atmosphere with cultural opportunities, and beautiful sceneries that brings much diversity to this particular vicinity. South Memphis area is large, stately, with some gorgeous property sites. Lastly, Whitehaven contains a cultural atmosphere of Elvis Presley's Graceland subdivision. Darnell has looked at the nicer neighborhoods and although these areas may sound like they are all glitter and glamorous, they is not. Darnell knows from first-hand experience that all glitter is not gold and all glamour is not attractive. Talking with some of the individuals in those areas, Darnell has found out that some of the individuals that live in those areas are looking for love from God, the church, family members, in relationships, etc. and many of them that Darnell has encountered, those individuals have some negative connotation of the church. Therefore, this has made Darnell more apt to want to minister to the needs of all of God's people in his Memphis community.

The Volunteer State

The State of Tennessee, where Memphis and Shelby County is located, has been coined as the Volunteer State. As the demographics have shown, it is a perfect place to want to minister the Word of God to people in those areas. Since it those areas are populated where violence occurs, many are seeking love from God and people, where racism still is prevalent even after King's death, there is yet a responsibility left for

Darnell and his congregation to speak with theological integrity to let people know in that particular area that there are other people who love, welcomes, and embrace those individuals into society. But, more importantly, that God loves, welcomes, and embrace those individuals as well. This is kingdom building for Darnell—letting people know that God love, welcomes, and embraces all people into the fold.

The Bible Belt

Memphis is known as the Bible Belt and it is home to many great gospel preachers, religious institutions and musicians. Many of these religious leaders, institutions and singers are too astronomical to name, but some of them include: the Bishop G. E. Patterson, founding pastor of the Temple of Deliverance, Church of God in Christ, (C.O.G.I.C.) and former Presiding Bishop of the Church of God In Christ (C.O.G.I.C.) denomination;[8] Mason Temple, headquarters of the Church of God In Christ founded by C. H. Mason;[9] the Reverend Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks, Baptist minister, American Civil Rights leader, and former executive director of the NAACP;[10] These distinguished individuals, along with Darnell's former pastors, have been instrumental to the point of helping Darnell to become the spiritual leader he is today. Although, Darnell grew up Baptist, he admired the work of the Pentecostal teachings of Bishop Patterson and C. H. Mason and how these individuals were able to preach holiness to all believers. Listening and watching Dr. Hooks in his fight for justice for equal rights for all has

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[8]G. E. Patterson, *Here Comes the Judge* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2002).

[9]Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001).

[10]*Famous Tennessean*, Tennessee Trivia. http://www.tntrivia.com/famous_tennesseans.htm (accessed November 22, 2011).

taught Darnell a lesson on how to embrace and incorporate that opportunity into his ministry.

There are churches on almost every corner and in every neighborhood for every denomination. Although Mount Vernon Baptist Church-Westwood was Darnell's former church home of twenty-eight years under the pastoral leadership of the Reverend Doctor James L. Netters, Sr. until August 31, 2009, it is still to this date considered to be Darnell's family church. Mount Gilead Ministries later became Darnell's other church home, which is located in the East Memphis area, until he stepped out on faith and birth his current ministry, the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis. God birthed into Elder Darnell Gooch, Jr. a vision to start a church ministry which began worshipping at the Double Tree Hotel, Memphis, Tennessee in August of 2012 until the church is able to find a church building to worship. The Cathedral of Praise is a Progressive Pentecostal church that is rooted from Pentecostal doctrines. The spiritual guidance and nurturing from Darnell's former pastors has been the driving force for that has helped him to be the spiritual leader that he is to his flock-a compassionate, loving, God-fearing, and humble man of God.

Since the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis' inception, the anointing of the Holy Spirit would seem to always be there. Based upon the membership's belief there is never a dull moment and the service is always high. Darnell's former churches were a large congregation that consisted of at least 4,500 members on roll at Mt. Vernon Baptist Church-Westwood and then at his other former church his current parish setting was at least 225 members at Mt. Gilead Ministries. However, at Darnell's current parish setting, it is a much smaller congregation right now since it is a newly established church. Over a

period of one month since its first service, Darnell's congregation has been averaging at least 40-50 people in attendance. His previous church ministries were extremely instrumental in helping him to advance in his ministry today at his current parish setting whereby Darnell has taken some positive leadership and negative leadership of his former pastors and Darnell has incorporated it into his spiritual repertoire for gleanings.

A Birth of New Hope

Darnell's vision for the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis is capitalized by providing a ministry that meets the needs of the members and all others are within the church's ability to do so. The goal of the Cathedral of Praise and mandate has been to produce disciples of Jesus Christ which involves at least the following four categories: worship (celebrating), ministry (caring), evangelism (cultivating), and discipleship (communicating). These four categories are taken from the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:36-40 and the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Also, it is the goal of the Cathedral of Praise to ensure that every ministry and activity of the Cathedral of Praise demonstrates a commitment to excellence. Through evangelism, empowerment, and victory, our ministry has become a place of praise, power, and progress, ministering to the needs of all people. Loren Cunningham, in his co-authorship of *Why Not Women?,* argues, "Sometimes we have to be willing to go in a new direction."[11] Theoretically, the belief of the Cathedral of Praise is based on this aphorism "Embracing people right where they are."

As the Minister of Membership and Training, Darnell's task was to revamp Mount Gilead Ministries' New Member Orientation. Administratively, there were some

[11]Loren Cunningham, David Joel Hamilton with Janice Rogers, *Why Not Women?* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 14.

things that needed major revision while on the other hand there were others that needed no modification. New Membership Personal Profile sheets were created. Now as the pastor of the Cathedral of Praise, Darnell was able to implement some of his revision of the Mount Gilead Ministries' New Member Orientation model that he created and format it to fit the Cathedral of Praise's New Member Orientation. Since the Cathedral of Praise only has a limited block scheduled for worship and Sunday school, there has not been time set aside for the New Member Orientation training as of yet.

On the first day of the Cathedral of Praise's Official Service there were over one hundred or more people in attendance. Throughout the month of August, the Cathedral of Praise has averaged at least fifty people or more in attendance after its first service. To this date, at least forty people have officially joined the church. The Cathedral of Praise did raise over $5,000.00 in contributions during its first month of service and the church was able to purchase a brand new keyboard with a built-in organ and drums, two speakers with built-in amplifiers, three microphones and other accessories for the enhancement of the worship service. The contributions for that month were also able to pay for the renting of space for worship and for musicians. As the pastor, Darnell is not accepting a salary at this particular time in order to help the church financially since it is a newly formed church with limited financial resources. The pastor has a full-time job as a police officer.

In some churches, women outnumber men in attendance. However, the demographics illustrate the opposite with men exceeding women in joining the church at the Cathedral of Praise. In order for Darnell to remain true to his vision of a diverse ministry and equate women in leadership roles, he most definitely has to place emphasis on evangelizing and utilizing women in ministry. As of right now, the statistics reveal

that there are twenty-four men, eleven women, two boys, and three girls who have officially become members. Two of the eleven women are mothers in the church and six out of the twenty-four men in the church are in leadership roles as preachers in the church. Also one out of the twenty-two men in the church is a trustee and one male is a deacon. The bulk of the membership at this time is predominately African American. But on the other hand, those in attendance for worship services show a diverse congregation that is comprised of Caucasians, African Americans, Asians, heterosexuals, ex-addicts, ex-prostitutes ex-drug dealers and or same sex couples. Although, many of these individuals have not joined the church yet, Darnell wants to continue to find a way to make individuals want to become a part of a great Body of Christ as the Cathedral of Praise and Darnell hopes are to build around a ministry of hospitality in hopes to make his congregation as diverse as possible to reach all facets of people for kingdom building.

It is Darnell's vision, as the pastor, for the Cathedral of Praise to be a diverse and inclusive body dedicated to spreading and exhibiting unconditional love to all God's children regardless of known and unknown differences that everyone may share. Many of its members have been labeled unfavorable by some in the church, in the community, and on the radio station because of their background, economic status, race, and sexuality. This unfavorable ostracism has adversely affected many individuals in the church; especially those who are same gender couples who may come to church to feel loved by a Christian community of Believers. Darnell's congregation prides itself regarding being able to reach all of humanity; however, it just so happens that some of the people in Darnell's parish, like same sex couples, have expressed how adversely affected and ostracized many of them have been treated in the church. Now this is not to say that other

groups of people have not been adversely affected and ostracized. Still and all, this is a welcoming community and certainly for the same sex couples.

As a result, many of the Cathedral of Praise's members have been ostracized, marginalized, and disenfranchised already and the ministry has not been established after a month. Darnell has aimed to reach those who have been out of church, not in church, and even those in the church who have experienced hurt in order to emphasize God's steadfast love for the church and its members. It seems that inhospitality in the church may be the cause why some of its members may have become bitter, angry with God, stray away from doing ministry work and or leave their church. It is Darnell's vision to see that this come to fruition for the Cathedral of Praise to be a diverse church where people are accepted as they are regardless of race, age, sex, marital status, religion, political beliefs, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation. Not only do some individuals who attend the Cathedral of Praise have come to the understanding that the church is a place for everyone, but so does Darnell. The church is often referred by Darnell as a hospital to the sick.

Mount Vernon has been the launching pad to Darnell's destined ministry. Though his previous ministerial positions at Mount Vernon have been related to the Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Singles Ministry, and the Young Adult Sunday school department, however, since his membership began at Mount Gilead, the bishop also endowed a position upon him that has been astronomical to the point of his spiritual maturity in church leadership at his current parish. At Mount Gilead, Darnell's position was the Senior Elder to the bishop. The Senior Elder or Chief Elder position acts almost similarly to an Assistant Pastoral or Executive Pastoral role in certain aspects. If the

bishop was absent, then the Senior Elder would oversee the church. The Senior Elder presides or officiates over the services until the bishop takes over. The Senior Elder empowers the laity by preaching and teaching in order to grow the church spiritually and physically; develops leaders in the church, promotes harmony and unity with the church of God. Aside being the Senior Elder, his other assignment was to oversee the New Member Orientation Ministry at Mount Gilead Ministries and so, having a leadership role has also impacted Darnell to produce spiritual leaders that will have a heart for ministry and be hospitable to all people and not just some people.

The Cathedral of Praise is a Progressive Pentecostal Church and the church is an independent congregation and is under no specific denomination. However, it is affiliated with the United Progressive Pentecostal Church, which is a denominational fellowship and network of leaders, pastors, churches and para-church ministries united in the mission of Jesus Christ to spread the Gospel to all people. As Pentecostals, it has been understood that Pentecostalism is not a denomination but a Holiness movement. Many Pentecostals believes that Pentecostalism is controlled by the Holy Spirit and not by a denomination or humanity. Man-made ideology does not dictate how the Holy Spirit moves, but rather the Holy Spirit dictates how man-made ideology moves.

Pentecostalism is a spiritual thing and it emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit by way of spiritual gifts such as glossolalia (speaking in tongues), prophesy, deliverance, divine healing, and worship. Darnell's Pentecostalism experience has given him a new sense of liberation in his preaching and teaching while simultaneously, it has cost him to lose some family, friends, and associates along the way because of his stance on a God of

all-inclusive worship. But, as a Memphis community, this allows everyone to strive to be a part of a corporate worship experience in Darnell's mission to help others.

As Progressive Pentecostals, the Cathedral of Praise has been an encouragement of self-expression of progressing ideology that fosters the essential principles and expression of the tradition of the Pentecostal movement. It welcomes the continued progressive principles of human inclusivity, social justice, ecumenicalism, and political activism.

In Acts 2:4 Luke argued the unity of the believers and how the Apostles spoke in tongues on one accord as the Spirit gave them utterance. Under the leadership of Bishop O. C. Allen, III, pastor of the Vision Church of Atlanta, in 2004 organized the United Progressive Pentecostal Church (UPPC) as it was birthed out of the tradition of Pentecostalism and the progressive move of the Holy Spirit. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, the Pentecostal movement has led many pastors, lay persons, churches to being welcoming, inclusive and biblically functioning in the community in joining the UPPC.[12] This was very spiritually electrifying for Darnell to know that there was an affiliation that Darnell and his congregation can be a part of and that share similar beliefs. It was as if God had answered Darnell's prayers to be connected with like minded individuals of same faith.

The Cathedral of Praise is developing bylaws and a form of government in order that the church may function and work smoothly with set policies and church procedures. It is the goal of the pastor to eventually develop the Cathedral of Praise as a non-profit religious corporation in the State of Tennessee. Currently, the pastor is in the process of finishing the 501(c)3 application and it is his desire to establish functioning outreach

[12]United Progressive Pentecostal Church, www.nzodesigns.com (accessed on August 27, 2012).

ministries that will assist those who are homeless with food and shelter, those infected with HIV/AIDS, aid those who are at risk youths with helpful mentor programs, build homes for Habitat for Humanity, and develop a safe haven housing for those who are in abusive relationships.

One of the many aims of the Cathedral of Praise is to inspire the members by giving an understanding of the Lordship of Jesus, the Spirit-Filled life, covenant relationship and the local church. For the new convert, this will provide a basic understanding of the New Testament church and what this church believes. For those who are moving their membership, it will support existing knowledge and give understanding to their place within this ministry. New Member Orientation will also provide an introduction to Spiritual Gifts. This is to help members determine what gifts he or she has to offer to the body of Christ. The primary goals of the New Member Orientation are to support the spiritual training and growth of the Cathedral of Praise new member by helping to share in the Pastor's vision, fundamental Christian doctrines and church's belief, empowering ministries and promote servitude.

The future ministries of the Cathedral of Praise as it continues to develop are as follows: Deacon's Board, Evangelism/Outreach, Good Shepherd Ministry, Hospitality Ministry, Matrons, Media Ministry/Public Relations, Men's Ministry, Minister's Council, Mother's Board, Music Ministry, New Member's Ministry, Security/Human Resources Ministry, Sunday School Department, Willing Workers Ministry, Women's Ministry, Trustee's Board, and Usher Ministry. The primary goals of many of these ministries are designed to witness, reach, and lead souls to Christ as well as teaching and training Christians for kingdom building. There are other ministries that will be developed over

time in the church but these are just a few that will become active in the life of the church.

When other churches would not ordain women or same gender loving people into the ministry, Darnell's church is going against the grain to allow these people to utilize the call God has given them as an ordained minister, deacon, trustee, etc. As pastor, Darnell is going to put the young people to work in the church in order to prepare them for future leadership as church leaders and laypeople. The ministries that Darnell's church has established is actually going to roll up their sleeves and hit the streets where other Christian dare to frequent and evangelize in the prisons, hospitals, clubs, halfway houses, homeless shelters, etc. There is a whole new world that Darnell wants to empower his congregation to spread God's love and Word to.

Being in the forefront of leadership in Mount Vernon and Mount Gilead has caused Darnell to ponder the way the church does ministry. Since his short tenure in this office as the Senior Elder at Mount Gilead, Darnell has inherited such a tremendous task of leading the church in many different facets and it has come to his conclusion that there is a great need to help empower the Cathedral of Praise to be what God wants it to be by demonstrating more love thy neighbor as thyself concepts, bringing restoration to those who have experienced church inhospitality, and addressing social issues and implementing more outreach programs to do prophetic ministry. These tools are necessary for this ministry's contextual setting. Growing up in the church has shown Darnell how to actually do ministry work. It is imperative that his preaching is biblically and exegetically sound in order to empower the laity to become better in embracing,

loving, and unifying the church to do the work that God has ordain them to do in their witnessing, making disciples, and church administration.

Synergy

As a young lad growing up in Memphis, Tennessee, Darnell's spiritual grooming took place at Mount Vernon Baptist Church-Westwood for over twenty-eight years under the pastorate of the Reverend Dr. James L. Netters, Sr. This Christian environment provided spiritual worship, teaching, preaching, guidance, and fun fellowship with his peers along with spiritual and positive admonishment from the church laity. These programs provided by Mount Vernon Baptist Church-Westwood had an enormous, insurmountable affect on his life. However, as time had evolved, God had another spiritual undertaking assignment for him to embark upon. To his surprise, God was preparing him for a new journey into the halls of his current parish at Mount Gilead Ministries under the leadership of the Bishop Charles E. Cartwright, which paved the way for his pastoral position at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis.

Ambivalence had set in because of the uncertainty for God's move. Psychologically, Darnell's psyche was not ready. Spiritually, God had confused him. Politically, intimidation was contemptuous. Socially, diversity was, too, demanding for him. Darnell was apprehensive and worried about what people were going to think about him and his new ministry. Anxiety put Darnell in fear of moving forward with what God instructed him to do. Yet, the Prophet Isaiah constantly reminded Darnell in the scriptures, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord" (Is 55:8, *NIV*). Besides, over time, the message was beginning to become transparent as God began to continuously challenge his spirituality. After

establishing a new parish, it was becoming clear to him that there was a great need to minister to God's people. It was evident to Darnell that many of the parishioners had been experiencing some type of church hurt or brokenness from unwelcoming embrace; including him being unwelcome and embrace for his ideology and theology.

This type of pain should not be stricken upon anyone. The pain that Darnell felt from his birth of his new ministry has shown him who really has his back and supports him. Many people who started out as supporters were later naysayers and this ranged from family members, church members, friends, musicians, co-workers, peer associates, etc. Many of them mainly supported the notion of embracing all people until Darnell mentions same gender loving individuals are included in the topic. When does the cycle of oppression stop?

It has been said that parishioners come to church to seek God, to worship, to fellowship, to learn, etcetera. But, in the history of Christendom, his readings have not found one Saint who has recorded that parishioners go to church to experience church inhospitality. As a matter of fact, it has become Darnell's desire to be a blessing to those who have experience inhospitality by exemplifying God's love as Christ loves us. Therefore, it has become his task to plant a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these for the Cathedral of Praise, who in essences will exhibit God's love during the parishioner's darkest hour. This message and model will hopefully reassure and restore the parishioner at the Cathedral of Praise of God's unwavering devotion to humankind.

The parishioners at the Cathedral of Praise have been adjoined together by God's grace, redemptive power, and reconciliation. Based upon some of the parishioner's testimonies given during Sunday morning service and personally spoken to him, many of

the Cathedral of Praise's members have become victimized by the church and hurt by inhospitable behaviors. Some single men at the Cathedral of Praise have expressed to Darnell how their former pastors or church leaders would not allow them to serve because the person (man) was not married while some women have confided in Darnell how women were not allowed to preach or stand in the pulpits at their former church because of the tradition that women are not suppose to be preachers and pastors or how same gender loving individuals have been sat down from being in positions because of their sexuality. A number of them face trials and tribulations on a daily basis. Many of their experiences have left the parishioners hopeless, wounded, and broken because of their past, present, and even mistaken identities, which they feel taunts them. Those who condemn the parishioners at the Cathedral of Praise know the *what* but do not know the *why* of their personal Christian experiences. These circumstances that these parishioners at the Cathedral of Praise face in life has affected their ability to maintain wholesome family ties, romantic relationships, friendships, and Christian duties. As a result, their spiritual relationships with God have been equivocally challenging because many of them have felt and expressed to Darnell about how God would allow people to treat others that way and still confess to be Christian.

Some of the parishioners at the Cathedral of Praise are ostracized, marginalized, and disenfranchised because of who members are and what members represent. In hearing many testimonies by the parishioners, some have been considered as outcast and rejects simply because of the sexuality of the member or the stigma placed on the church. Although, many individuals are members at the Cathedral of Praise, there are some who are not members that come to visit that corresponds with similar thoughts. These

disappointing memories of pain and grief may have contributed to the inhospitality of the parishioners. Thus, causing many individuals to leave other churches and join the Cathedral of Praise. As one who has also experienced many types of church inhospitality because of individuals throwing stones, passing judgments, and condemning, John 8:7 in the *New Living Translation Bible* (*NLT*) gives Darnell a biblical foundation to the Christian faith, which refrains from the plan of condemnation. The church is thought of to be a place of refuge and strength as the hymnologist, David, describes in Psalms 55:8 (*NLT*). It has been somewhat of the Christian theological understanding that the church should adopt the methods of a hospital in the sense of taking in, caring for, and nurturing the sick back to good health through the word of the Lord after they repent as the Prophet Joel implies in the *Access Bible*, *New Revised Standard Version* (*NRSV*) (Jl 2:1-27).

The parishioners were attracted to the Cathedral of Praise because of the sense of liberation that the atmosphere offers. This same liberating power of God that flows in the church is the same stimulating affect that their leader, Elder Darnell Gooch, Jr., wants to generate in the surrounding Memphis community. To some, at times, it may seem like the Cathedral of Praise may be too liberating because of its stance on affirming same gender loving individuals as having full rights of membership as others since some individuals are staunched advocates that homosexuality is wrong or that women should not have a place in the pulpit or that drunks, prostitutes and drug dealers should not be welcomed into the church. However, the church cannot afford to reject those who are different in race, background, heterosexual persuasion or any other informality. The church should be like a melting pot and all persons are dissimilar because of various ethnicities, colors, sexes, ages, religions, political beliefs, national origins, disabilities, marital statuses, class

statuses, and sexual orientations. The only similarities that should exist should emphasize that fact that the members commune together in love, to worship and serve God, and to become sanctified as a result of their Christian commitment.

Darnell recalled ministering to a lady who expressed her calling into the ministry but was told that she would never preach in that particular church. That pastor had forced the lady to leave the church. The woman felt pain like she was a product of the slavery mentality before it was ever abolished. Some of the individuals who have expressed personal experiences wanted to remain anonymous because of fear, retaliation and or for the sake of peace with that particular church and pastor. Apart from those personal opinions and bias beliefs, the Cathedral of Praise will aim to accept those who have been rejected, scarred, and bruised no matter who you are and what your situation, in order that God may heal the wounds of their soul. The Prophet Jeremiah asked rhetorically, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?" (Jer 8:22, *NIV*). God is endowing Darnell with the understanding in knowing why God instructed him to organize the Cathedral of Praise. It was a result of his previous experience being non-hospitable by the church or members of the church that helped him to encourage, instill hope, and enlighten people, which have truly become a balm of sorts in the Cathedral of Praise.

It has come to his attention that some of the members of the Cathedral of Praise as well as the 19,926 Memphians in the community may have come from broken homes, broken marriages, and unstable relationships.[13] Even individuals who do not fit into either one of these categories still may experience some type of family challenge. Don

[13]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF-3)-Sample Data: Geographic area: Memphis city, Tennessee.* http://www.factfinder.census.gov (accessed August 23, 2011).

Anderson-Fisher, a Memphian, who is a same gender loving individual living in the Midtown area of Memphis, talks with Bianca Phillips, a journalist in the *Memphis Flyer* about what it is like to be gay in Memphis, the buckle of the Bible Belt. Anderson-Fisher elaborates how he would not expose his adopted son to the kinds of hatred that exist even in mega churches in Memphis. Another same gender-loving individual named J. B., who does not give his full name, is a friend with Anderson-Fisher, and he adds how individuals in this city are closed-minded. J. B. further expounds on how religious leaders have convinced their laity to follow their beliefs and to believe one way. Although J. B. does not name any large conservative parish in the city, however, those parishes are prominent ecumenical influences in the city.[14]

Marian Wright Edelman inspires Darnell when she could not have said it any better in Samuel DeWitt Proctor's book *The Substance of Things Hoped For.* Edelman includes this in the foreword:

> I believe a religious congregation, a home church, plays an important role in children's lives. While it cannot replace the love and support of children receive from their families, religious congregations can act as an extended family, helping children find faith and hope they need to remain strong and find their way...I believe, as Sam writes, that "we must reach back and find ways to help others" who are "mired in poverty, alcoholism, violence and immorality...or the whole American nation may sink. This is the new tenet of our faith." We must reach out most of all to children and commit to mentoring and healing. And we must understand that the solutions lie in family, education, wise public policy, and a return to moral values that are lived and not just preached.[15]

Although Marian Wright Edelman talks about helping children find their faith and staying well established, to Darnell, this message can also apply to all of humankind in general. As a preacher of the Gospel, there is an incumbency upon all to remain faithful

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[14]Bianca Phillips, "Gays in Memphis," *Memphis Flyer*. http://www.memphisflyer.com (accessed February 10, 2012).

[15]Samuel Proctor, Foreword to *The Substance of Things Hoped For* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995), xvi-xvii.

to God's word by reaching out to help all people who have experienced inhospitality by all immoralities of society. The Gospel is promised to everyone who believes and that is certainly the Good News. Having the power of reconciliation and restoration can teach individuals how to embrace and love all of God's creation. This agape love that God has endowed is a testimony of the church and Darnell's intentional allegiance.

If the church believes in reaching out beyond the four walls of its parish and going into the world to do the Great Commission, then why is it so arduous for the church to accept, embrace, love, and equalize all individuals as a Christian body as God has commanded? This is very startling to know that some churches are really not living up to the mandate that God has set forth. It is Darnell's prayer that from this project the testimony of the church and his intentional allegiance will demonstrate God's power of reconciliation and restoration for the believer. Furthermore, it is his dream and hopefully the vision of the church to regurgitate with integrity the Reverend Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.'s, "*I Have A Dream*" speech to the parishioners; specifically the segment when King says,

> …And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition…This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'…I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed-we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal…And when this happens, when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last'.[16]

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[16]Clayborne Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 1998), 224-227.

As a typical visionary, King, envisioned all people being guided by the essential principle values of freedom, justice, and peace in a created Beloved Community under the auspices of the biblical idea of Shalom. In other words, what King wanted was for all people to be freed from injustices and to treat each other with dignity, respect, love and to reside in a peaceful Beloved Community established by the Creator. Theoretically, this is the ideal theological vocation of the church in exhibiting hospitality. Thus, it has become the duty of the Cathedral of Praise to conjure its parishioners to such a divine call as this. Consequently, if the Cathedral of Praise is to use a concept as King did, then the Cathedral of Praise would see a transformation in the way it does ministry. The transition will no longer include just a membership with majority Blacks, but it will include a variety of all races, disabilities, sexual orientations, and family make-ups. Statistically, the Cathedral of Praise's complement will illustrate sudden drastic changes in its current ecclesiastical assembly. The church is considered not exclusive but, rather, inclusive, and, since the church is inclusive, then all should be welcomed to worship God freely. Not only will the Cathedral of Praise benefit from the changes of inclusivity, but so will its surrounding communities, city, county, state, nation and world.

The purpose of this project is to empower the Cathedral of Praise to bridge the gap concerning individuals who have been unwelcomed and not accepted in the church. The researcher will plant a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these as its focus. Interpreting the Word of God will be the agent that causes the change in the way the church embraces and accepts all of its parishioners. This is necessary in order to enhance the church in ministering to needs of all the members. This is an essential

challenge that will make a great impact in improving the church's relationship with its heterogeneous members.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

The primary purpose for this ministry was to plant a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these within the church context. What has been of greatest concern was how members of the body of Christ (people) were made to feel unwelcomed in the House of God. The preaching and teaching moments are where the congregation should embody the ideas of the preacher. If the preacher ever wants to survive in his or her parish, then he or she must be able to create an atmosphere that welcomes all persons. This preaching and teaching development should unfold a ministry of hospitality that is considered as five star excellence. The planting of a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these from the body Christ in the church should be able to be transformative and uplifting whereby individuals are able to release the shackles of oppression and made to feel embraced by God. Over the course of time, hospitality has been slacking in the church and it is time for the church to step up their response to the body of Christ by being more loving, open, and embracing; especially if the church wants to win souls for Christ. This is the overall aim of the church—to win souls for Christ.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the researcher's familiarity with hospitality in the church and how it needs to be revamped in order to promote a more harmonious worship experience in the lives of those who attend church. What is obtained in this literary review is only a small portion of information given to support this ministry

project. However, there are other literatures that are not cited as well that may help advance the researcher's project that could be possibly used. Therefore, this chapter seeks to reveal scholarship and models from scholars and theologians who have previously tackled such a task in bridging the gap between the church and the body of Christ to promote genuine love through hospitable acts. The researcher has found essential reading material and ministry models that contain applicable and pertinent material to aid this ministry project. Many of the germane information of the models and reading material serve as a catalyst that prompts the urgency for this ministry project. In this project, the researcher will show how influential these other findings are as it will be helpful for the advancement of this ministry project throughout the church and abroad.

Ministry Model

The Five-Star Church: Serving God and His People with Excellence by Stan Toler and Alan Nelson has been a model for many churches. It has guided church leaders into developing principles, ideas, and strategies for becoming the idea church that will become effective and successful in serving people. This book has been a great resource for many pastors who wish to strive for excellence in leading the church towards a more unified and welcoming congregation that meets the needs of all of God's people. *The Five-Star Church* promotes service to the people. Elmer Townes writes in the *Foreword* section of *The Five-Star Church,* "In this book, they encourage and provoke Christians to nurture hearts and minds devoted to excellence in our service for God."[1]

[1]Stan Toler and Alan Nelson, *The Five-Star Church: Serving God and His People with Excellence*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999), e-Book, loc. 39 of 2158.

This ministry model has been used to strengthen and uplift individuals who have felt like the church has let them down in the way that it provides a service to those individuals that enter the doors to seek comforting words of hope from God. It is how the church treats individuals during their time in worship service that captivates the hearts of the individuals, which draws them back to the church. Toler and Nelson descriptively give a walk thru of how *The People-Focused Church* should exemplify in their illustration of the Majesty Suites hotel. The writers vividly describe the scenery of how courteous everyone is and how the attitude of the hotel general manager, Jeff Hollister, is above reproach. In Toler and Nelson's book, the writers quote Jeff Hollister by adding, "…people don't return simply because of your rating. They come because you provide great service and constantly strive to meet their needs."[2]

This book speaks to the leaders in the church in an effort to promote and enhance a pleasant environment that the church central focus is built around the people who enter its sanctuary. Although God is the main center attraction, however, the people are also a major factor in doing ministry work because it is God who commanded us to love and serve others. What is encouraged in this book is how to develop quality relationships with all individuals. People-skills are a must in order to develop meaning and genuine relationships with others who may not have similar ideologies. "We learn to love, accept, and forgive those on our team who may not feel the way we feel about an idea" in Toler and Nelson's discussion with Jeff Hollister.[3]

Several different church models are listed and emphasized in Toler and Nelson's attempt to promote excellence in the church. Using evaluation, measurements and a rate

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[2]Ibid., loc. 85 of 2158.

[3]Ibid., loc. 760 of 2158.

system to rate the quality of service provided by the church and its people gives an indication of what type of services are being offered and how to better improve those services mentioned. Leadership training is inspired in developing quality people in ministry. Such leadership and skills training classes should preferably address questions like: What are the values of the church? What is the role of the church in the community? What is the key to ministry effectiveness? These are some questions in which this model helps to make clarity on the issues at hand that plague the church, and it gives some enhancement on ways to making ministry more effective by quality-improvement programs that make the people feel comfort and loved in worship.

Scholarly Writings

There are numerous academic books and literature on how to minister and improve the life of a believer and offer a better way of living for the Christian. As a matter of fact, much of what is preached in pulpits is centered on sustaining a relationship with God in order that one's life might line up with God's will. However, there is not enough on planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these. When it comes down to really embracing all of God's people and practice inclusion, do the church really stand by what it says? Some scholarly individuals have pressed the need for the church to be more welcoming to individuals who are having difficulty in being accepted in the church.

Amos Yong's *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor (Faith Meets Faith)* has biblical scholarship and offers insightful practical teachings of Jesus as a means to build on the faiths of the early church. Yong distinguishes on how the religious other is not an outcast but an extension of the family of

God. Yong points out that the religious other is a neighbor and should be afforded hospitality as Christ has given to Christians. This hospitality is not just keeps sake, but it should be spread abroad and even in the community. It is a symbol of the extension by which God has granted all of humanity grace.

The anthology of Amy Oden's book, *And You Welcomed Me*, highlights specifics tasks during the early medieval period of the religious sector that cared for pilgrims and the sick. It is a litany of influential literary compositions that is recorded for instructional purposes of caring for and or hosting the strangers. Oden documents the historical, geographical and social contexts as a way to educate the communities about the differences and uniqueness that all persons possession. This is in an effort to exemplify the need for hospitality to be extended and for people to experience a means to building a community of faithful believers.

B. Allen Quigley and Gary W. Kuhne editors of *Creating Practical Knowledge Through Action Research: Posing Problems, Solving Problems and Improving Daily Practice* has been a guide to action research. It challenges the adult learners to improving their ability to identity and meet instructional techniques and training programs for various settings, including corporate, educational, religious and health education. Church leaders can use this guide as a way to train their ministers and ministry leaders to understand analysis, interpretation and resolution of conflicts. It is good for assisting in providing convenient project planning of ministry activities or other day-to-day daily activities.

In order to understand the tenets of Barbara Brown Taylor's book, *Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation,* Taylor argues how sin leads to ultimate repentance.

Taylor's investigation reveals several paradigms: medical, legal and theological has led to sickness, lawlessness, and rebellion. Taylor defends the sin as the means to which humans continue to experience detachment, withdraw and separation from the values of one's society and family. As a pastoral theologian, Taylor focuses on the lost language of sin and salvation. Taylor conveys in the Garden of Eden story, a tree bearing fruit that illustrates Adam and Eve developing a spiritual bond with God. But also through this illustration, disobedience was the disconnection of this spiritual bonding with God.

Billy Lewis' dissertation on "Manna House: The Practice of Christian Hospitality in Memphis" has been a project that Lewis implemented in the Memphis community as a way to improve the relationship between people and those who may be coined as outcast. It is obvious that Lewis is passionate in striving for hospitable treatment to all persons. His message is expressed throughout his dissertation project highlighting the need to reach out to the poor, disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed. For Lewis, Christian hospitality goes far beyond the local church committees and extends outside of the four walls of the church and into the community abroad.

In *The New Testament World: Insight from Cultural Anthropology*, Bruce J. Malina writes about the pivotal values of the First-Century Mediterranean world by examining social communication as a form of social interaction. What Malina argues in this book is how the honor and shame system were either ascribed or acquired during the time period. Being that honor and shame were quite the contrast of each other, it was a primary illustration of how people were classified and yet subjected to the mistreatment and inhospitable acts of one another based upon the cultural channels of that time period. The models in cultural anthropology derived from presuppositions that often were a

reflection of the nature of the caste or social system in which an individual may have been a part of. In Malina's book, trying to understand ethnocentrism posed a greater risk in which an individual may try to avoid the recognizable danger zones that the cultural systems possessed. At times, the cultural systems were not understandable as it related to the behaviors and mistreatment of those individuals with the social order. Even for Jesus, who was noted, as being honorable because of his Messianic bloodline was yet dishonored, shamed, and humiliated by being crucified on a cross between two thieves.

As a Bishop, Carlton Pearson goes against the grains of religious doctrines and stands with Christian bravery for his theological beliefs in his book entitled *The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching Beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God and Self.* Pearson, a well known leader, preacher, and evangelist in the church grew to have a mega ministry and then later was deem a heretic by some of his fellow clergyperson because of his gospel of inclusion. His stance on a hell-less Christianity brought worldwide divisions in the religious sector. As the man of God that he is, Pearson lost everything for the sake of his new identity as he began to preach the love of God who does not condemn those to hell who were not Christian.

Christine Pohl's book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition,* elaborates and stresses on the need for reforming the ideal meaning of hospitality. To Pohl, Christian hospitality is the essence the Christian praxis. Hospitality as Pohl argues was the main theme of the gospel. It was necessary in the Old and New Testaments as the scriptures expound on the issue of welcoming strangers and it should be applied as a biblical principle for Christians today. Pohl merged both the biblical and

historical discourses to better equip the readers with an understanding of a faithful commitment of hospitality.

One good practice that is highlighted throughout all of these scholastic readings is emphasized in the art of African American preaching that is pointed out in Dr. Cleophus LaRue's book, *I Believe I'll Testify*. In LaRue's collection of African American preaching, LaRue seeks to break the ice off of what is great preaching. LaRue recognizes the need for such a preaching style that bleeds over into post modernity. Much of what LaRue writes speaks to cultural differences and diversity. What is at the heart of good preaching is being able to go against the grain and take risks in preaching that are often at times challenging even in the pews.

In *I Believe I'll Testify*, a particular interest to the writer was LaRue's ability to unravel the minds of the readers by clearing up some complexities concerning a preaching style that may seem like it's impossible among other cultures and ethnicities in Chapter Two of the book, entitled *Black Preaching and White Homiletics.* LaRue's view of the late Samuel DeWitt Proctor as not being against Black preaching but argues that Proctor sensed too much diversity in the Black preaching style. However, as the world becomes advanced in the post modern era, there is a need to embrace both Black and white preaching styles, which illustrates how different preaching styles are being more welcoming and accepted in pulpits to reach a vast growth of diverse congregations. LaRue writes,

> The parameters of homiletics are ever expanding, and contextuality will be the name of the game in the years to come. Hispanics, Asians Americans, Native Americans, and others will have much to contribute to this discussion. A healthy appreciation of and lively exchange between all homiletic traditions will make for stronger preachers irrespective of ethnicity, gender, regional differences, and denominational ties. The teaching of preaching in the future, if it is to be

> effective, will have to reflect the broad and rich diversity of the global village that is now so clearly upon us and so much a part of who we are. Celebrating and building on our diversity are among the things most needful in our preaching today.[4]

Diane Kessler's book, *Receive One Another: Hospitality in Ecumenical 34 Perspective*, is gives great instruction on ecumenical hospitality. Kessler provides the readers with a distinction between being generous and cordial by displaying scrupulous actions between the hosts and guests. The gist of Kessler's theme on ecumenical hospitality should foster divine healing among the Christians and in the church. Kessler's book describes historical and biblical accounts concerning hospitality. Some of Kessler's critical account takes the readers on a passage through biblical narration in Genesis 18 and 19. Kessler mentions the friendliness of Abraham and Sarah towards visitors.

Kessler thoroughly researches even how other cultural environments can perceive how offering hospitality during the biblical narrative was sometimes taken in offense rather than in good faith. In order to unveil the Old Testament teachings, Kessler offers theological reasoning behind Ecumenical hospitality. Kessler suggest illustrative practices of what ecumenical hospitality should like. It emphasizes a desire for Christians to love one another, embrace other individuals' ideologies and to gain knowledge concerning God's way of love. The rhetoric Kessler brings in this insightful reading proclaims the wholeness of Christ and uses hospitality as a model for good practices.

Elaine Flake's *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women* has captured the essence of what it is to be a wounded woman who is not embraced in the life of the church. This liberating book offers marginalized women a place in society through a developed theology that demands holistic healing and restoration among the African

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[4]Cleophus LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 35.

American communities. Flake presents a Womanist Theology that depicts the life and role of women in respect to the cultural context of women in society and the church. As a pastor, Flake seeks to welcome hurting women into the vital worship experience through the liberating Word of God. This feminist theological perspective has aimed to end the prejudices that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex and gender discrimination.

Socially, religiously, and politically, there's a need for growth and *Preaching to a Postmodern World* by Graham Johnston argues a similar generalization. Johnston points to the Enlightenment period as a way to recognize a need for radical transformation in the way the postmodern world thinks. Johnston accentuates that preaching postmodernity should be able to effectively communicate to a vast growing postmodern world of listeners, especially in a progressively growing church. Johnston utilizes several methods in which he strives to reach a specific people; namely Christian communicators.

During a time when the Civil Rights Movement was evolving, James Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore argue in their book, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, that this was a time when Black Power and Black Theology was emerging throughout the United States. These two authors have in no doubt inspired the African American community by overcoming their oppressive state and even in the Black church. The book offers the two authors personal experiences and introduces the world to a form of liberation that is authentically challenging as it extended into the Black community. What is almost common to the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is noted in Cone and Wilmore's statement "We believe that it is God's will that all men should live together in a state of harmonious mutuality and creative good will."[5]

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[5]James H. Cone & Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 299.

George Hunsinger critical study discovers the most controversial interpretations of Karl Barth's theology. Hunsinger's *How to Read Karl Barth* points out the existence of why God exist. He argues the aesthetics of God's creation. The practical theory in which Hunsinger makes of Barth's philosophy is valued as being appreciative in the sight of God. His discussion of Barth's work has indeed given recognition to many contemporary considerations offered by Barth's theological stances.

According to James Cone in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, denotes the biblical traditional beliefs surrounding the shame concept that accents the cross and Crucifixion of Christ. Cones approach to this rational belief lies on the premises that the Christian story or Christian experience should revert back to the crucifixion of Christ. Being that individuals are categorized under the shame concept should be more reasoning for one to recognize the essence of the cross. Theologically, Cone bridges the reality of Black oppression and suffering experience to reconciliation through the liberated gospel message during a period in history when the lynching of Black people were considered as the norm in the United States. Cone's voice shuns evil in the form of these lynches and embraces God's love and aspire to achieve human justice as a symbolism of Christ's unwavering love for all on the cross.

As a president of the United States, John F. Kennedy's gives his rendition of what the immigration reform should actually look like in light of the issues that may have been negatively reflected as a means to create hatred and division among a certain group of people. Although America has a strong belief in tradition, Kennedy expounds on the will of humanity to create a loving environment for all persons to dwell as a symbol of their God given right of freedom. He writes to inspire the immigration policy to speak against

dehumanizing qualities and take a stand for justice and morality. This is one of the very basic principles of how people should treat one another, which is essential to the Christian faith to which everyone deserves the freedom to make a better way of life for them and their families.

Karl Barth's *Deliverance to the Captives* is a collection of sermons of which tells the evangelical passion and social concerns of a Basil prison. It also offers several prayers that invite God into the very midst of the individual's situation in a conscious attempt to provide deliverance to the captives. These sermons preached by Barth captures the participation of all walks of life, the elderly, incarcerated, poor, and the sick, the opportunity for deliverance. His message centers on hospitality and unity of fellowship for all humankind.

Ladislaus J. Bolchazy delves into and explores the dynamics of the Greek culture in his book, *Hospitality in Early Rome: Livy's Concept of its Humanizing Force.* Bolchazy gives an account of distinguishing various cultures and illustrate how hospitality was given as a result of each culture's tradition. What is emphasized in the book is that hospitality was not demonstrated to the strangers in a way to present hostility but in a way that extends a warm-hearted welcome to the stranger. Therefore, this book is more of a re-clarification to the Christians of its understanding of what hospitality really is.

In his book, *Real Church in a Social Network World: From Facebook to Face to Face Faith,* Leonard Sweet argues that the way to engage people is by having right relationships and if the world wants to ever overcome rules set by society then individuals must reconnect with people by developing relationships. He points out how

inherent tension between rules and relationships has damaged the Christian witness. Furthermore, Sweet says, "This same tension lies at the heart of the church's struggle for identity in an increasingly hostile culture. And a misguided allegiance to rules over relationships also has impoverished the pursuit of the life of faith for every one of us."[6] The question has come to individuals today, which will be the choice: Rules or Relationships?

Here Sweet finds it more important to choose relationships rather than rules. The shift is to reject moralism and develop primary relationships with individuals since it is the foundation in everything that humans do. He contends that God is looking for an argument. In other words, the biblical scholar, Conrad Gempf asserts in his book *Jesus Asked*,

> The God of the Jews and Christians is unlike any other god. Dispute with Jupiter and you'll have one of those yellow-painted wooden lightning bolts shoved down your throat. Talking back to Allah is likely to get you into even more trouble than talking back to my sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Davidovitch. Try arguing with Buddha and he'll laugh at you derisively for treating any conversation as if it referred to something real. But when you start arguing with Yahweh, he smiles, rolls up his anthropocentric sleeves, and starts to look interested. The strangest thing is that he likes losing the arguments even more than he likes winning them. Jacob, the trickster, is beloved of God. And Abraham didn't just get away asking, "What about if there are only twenty righteous men in the city?" The God of the Jews and Christians is the only God that allows his followers To hear him say, "Oh, all right, you win.[7]

What Gempf is proving in this statement is that relationships can develop even in the midst of obvious differences in beliefs. This relationship allowed individuals to become

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[6]Leonard Sweet, *Real Church in a Social-Network World: From Facebook to Face-to-Face Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2011), e-book, loc. 812 of 1889.

[7]Conrad Gempf, *Jesus Asked: What He Wanted to Know* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 2003), 109.

friends without any prejudices by coming together to have dinner and engage in compelling conversations.

Sweet also elaborates on how individuals can become comfortable in their environment, especially with people and things that are familiar to the individual. But what he points out is how adapting to change can broaden the growth of the individual. Sweet tells a story of an otter and how a renowned anthropologist named Gregory Bateson was brought in to examine the otter, which seemed to be depressed. What Bateson discovered was that after he engaged the sleepy otter by taking a piece of paper, hooking it to a string and dangling it over the otter's head, the otter became intrigued with the paper swaying in the air. As a result, more otters were curious and thus a relationship formed between the otters and Bateson. This is what Sweet notated by Bateson is this,

> The magic of a dangling piece of paper was not the paper but the stirring stick that shook up the otter's environment and introduced some novelty that energized their interactions. When relationships get too comfortable and predicable, the intervention of stirring sticks is imperative if growth is to take place.[8]

There comes a time when the stirring of the sticks needs to apply in order that the church may wake up from its sleeping slumber and develop relationships with people who come to worship God. What Sweet tries to make clear is that it is okay at times to go against the grain or rules or order so that an establishment of connection among people can take place. Everyone is not always going to think alike, dress alike, talk alike, etc., but what Sweet asserts is that it is okay so that individuals may pride themselves with new ideas, new experiences, and new energies.

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[8]Sweet, *Real Church in a Social-Network World,* loc. 887 of 1889.

Loren Cunningham, David Joel Hamilton with Janice Rogers, in a partnership, writes in *Why Not Women?* in an effort to be a voice for women in church leadership. It is their hope that women will not continue to allow men to dictate their place in God's kingdom. What these authors share in this book helps men to understand a detailed study of women who were in the Bible; specially the Old Testament scriptures, Jesus' ministry and the context of Paul's letters. This book also lists the historical accounts of the Roman Jewish and Greek cultures and the early church. This clarion call is a call to women's action in the public ministry.

Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques' book, *Cultural Change and Your Church: Helping Your Church Thrive in a Diverse Society*, unmasked the cultural differences in the church. These writers have presented this book to contribute to the phenomenon of a society that is multicultural and transcends that of the New Testament-type church. Although, the New Testament-type church of the early church era was much diverse in nature, so is this new-aged multicultural church that is growing rapidly in the metropolis, where ambitious people from all over come to worship. As people all over different demographics, e.g., Americans, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hispanics, and more, who come together for work, play, shop, and school, these individuals should feel liberated in a sense to come together for communal worship experience in the church. This book marks biblical references and pedagogical education that has become effective ministry tools used to develop multicultural congregational settings.

Pocock and Henriques notates a multicultural model that is an easier and effective way of illustrating how a pluralistic society comes together through interaction with one another. Through the positive strategies of assimilation, Pocock and Henriques have

identified cultural identity and how the non-dominant group prefers to interact with the dominant groups. It is through this process that Pocock and Henriques gathers an understanding that the through integration, people are able to make a free-willed choice shared by either assimilation or separation. One model that Pocock and Henriques emphasizes is the Adam and Eve model, where God interacts with both Adam and Eve, in the book of Genesis. In the garden God interacts with Adam and Eve is a primary example that illustrates how people should interact today as suggested by Pocock and Henriques.

Becoming a transformative learner as Patricia Cranton labels it in *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* means that educators shape their experiences in order to gather some type of meaning behind it.[9] Once an individual has an understanding of their transformation theory to their experiences, then those transformation theories are applications to solutions of everyday practical uses. These practical applications give suggestive ways of many using many perspectives to obtain knowledge for conducting praxis. Praxis can be used and implemented in our ministry contexts and in other areas of profession for transforming people and yourself. These transformative issues address things in the project by using such studies like action research and responsive action research.

Peter Rollins provides in his book, *Insurrection*, a didactical rendition of the crucifixion as a launching pad to illustrate and promote unconditional love. How people encounter one another is based upon the love that individuals have for God. It is Rollins' belief that,

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[9]Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996), 116.

> To experience is to encounter *something.* But in the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection we discover that God is not something that we encounter directly and thus is not something that we experience. Rather, God is that which transforms how we experience everything, i.e., love. God is the name we give to the way of living in which we experience the world as worthy of living for, fighting for, and dying for…Traditionally we are brought to love the world because we love God and God loves the world. But once we embrace the understanding of God testified to in Christ, the middle reference that stands between us and the world dissolves entirely; we no longer love the world because God loves it, but rather we simply love the world and, in doing so, express our love for God."[10]

Here in his book, Rollins makes an implication that it is because of the individual's love for God that people are able to love the world. Loving God by way of loving Christ allows Rollins to develop a radical expression of faith that far exceeds the definition of the church's religious values. It is his means to extract a new theology and ideology of what church really is.

In Rollins discussion of the theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he writes, "For Bonhoeffer, religion at its most basic defined a particular way of thinking about and relating to God, a way of approaching God as a solution to problems such as fear, ignorance, or despair."[11] This prodigy of theological theory of Bonhoeffer's was never developed. However, Rollins picks up the mantle in hopes of transcending the epoch in church life, which has often been viewed as a psychological crutch says Bonhoeffer.[12] Rollins raise many questions that challenge the integrity of the believer, which requires the believer to either reevaluate their integrity or reject their belief about God. What Rollins tries to convey in his teachings is that an individual's conversion experience has

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[10]Peter Rollins, *Insurrection* (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2011), 123.

[11]Ibid., loc. 84 of 2663.

[12]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1971), 280-82.

to possess love, if not, then Rollins add, "In other words, the claim *I believe in God* is nothing but a lie if it is not manifest in our lives, because one only believes in God insofar as one loves."[13] Through this type of teaching, an individual is able to grasp the meaning of love. How love is described is in light of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. The idea of experiencing God's love allows people to learn by experience the brokenness that Christ felt and thus, this allows individuals to experience the brokenness of others when others are loved.

In *Studying Congregations* edited by Nancy Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl S. Dudley and William McKinney, these editors have identified steps for church leaders to determine the future of the church's congregation as it relates to the growth of the church in its many different facets of culture, context, theoretical beliefs, missions, etc. It provides ways for the church leaders to conduct action research within its context. There are resourceful materials like surveys and tools that will orient the individual into developing an analysis of its congregational context. It offers effective steps for building a community that is ministry-focused or ministry-driven.

R. Alan Culpepper's volume of *The Gospel and Letters of John* points out the relationship of both John and the Synoptic Gospels. It is a both literary and anatomical in its work. The historical context in which Culpepper provides on the Johannine community is rather noteworthy and vital to the literature that Culpepper writes on. Culpepper provides an in-depth overview of the Gospel and Letters of John. His book seems to lift the hearts of the oppressed and the marginalized which is germane to the ministry of what Jesus sets out to do.

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[13]Rollins, *Insurrection*, 127.

The Death of the Messiah by R. E. Brown is a scholarly written book that examines biblical accounts of the four synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These four Gospels document the death of Jesus and how such a drastic turning point in the Christian history has been the central theme throughout Christian history. Brown's synthesizing of this compilation of these Gospels breaks down theological rhetoric. Brown also gives the reader a snapshot of what it was like during the final days of Jesus' life. This illustration of the final days of Christ is the ultimate love that Brown wants his readers to understand that humanity should exemplify to one another.

Samuel Proctor's *Substance of Things Hoped For* shows a reflection of his own faith. As a noted theologian and educator at the United Theological Seminary, Proctor gives a chronicle of his family's historical account of events. He elaborates on his grandmother who was a former slave in hopes of obtaining an optimistic faith. This book also documents the faith of his African American heritage and culture as well as the problems faced by many African Americans during that time period. Proctor summons the church to a different attitude in order to liberate those who are oppressed.

Rudy Rasmus, and Dottie Escobedo-Frank's *Jesus Insurgency: The Church Revolution from the Edge,* shares their views concerning the hearts of pastors and how many pastors have a heart to love all people and are committed to transforming the minds of how the church does ministry and evangelistic work. Escobedo-Franks give her viewpoints of a dying church, divided church, and means for a call to action. Rasmus identifies and defines insurgents and how insurgents seek to demand change in many institutions. Rasmus identifies several previous individuals throughout history who have

been coined in their similar acts of bravery as insurgents over a time span who prompted change in society.

Stan Toler and Alan Nelson's *The Five Star Church: Serving God and His People With Excellence* have compiled this book together in hopes to give an understanding to its readers how restaurants and hotels earned their five star rating. Many individuals have pondered how did these ratings ever come about; Toler and Nelson provides an overview or summation of this report. The authors compare such restaurants and hotels to reveal the same pursuit of such five star ratings as a need to be utilized in churches in an effort to pursue Christian excellence. Tips, tools, and inspiration is offered as ways to help build the church and its people.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Biblical Foundation

Hospitality can have many different meanings depending upon the context of the discussion at hand. If an individual was to define what hospitality means in today's culture, then hospitality would imply a person or place offering some type of kind gesture to someone else. In his thesis on "Manna House: The Practice of Christian Hospitality in Memphis," Billy A. Lewis, describes the hotels and motels as a hospitality industry and he also mentions how the church has hospitality committees to welcome visitors to Sunday worship services.[1] But for the sake of this project hospitality refers to the biblical understanding as it specifically relates to the holistic impact of Christian hospitality.

Hospitality and the treatment of strangers, Greek word (ξένος), are eye-catching themes to the culture of the Old Testament. Expressions of hospitality and the treatment of strangers are emphasized in the Old Testament book of Genesis 18: 1-15, NRSV. As the narrative unfolds, the Lord appears to Abraham (the founding father of the three Western monotheistic religions,[2] which indicates one religion as oppose to a polytheistic religion; more than one religion) and Sarah by way of casual guests. Abraham would act

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[1]Billy A. Lewis, "Manna House: The Practice of Christian Hospitality in Memphis" (Master's thesis, Memphis Theological Seminary, 2008), 1.

[2]F. E. Peters, *Children of Abraham: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); cf. Joan Chittister, O.S.B., Murshid Saadi Shakur Chishti, and Rabbi Arthur Waskow, *The Tent of Abraham: Stories of Hope and Peace for Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2006).

as a greeter and welcome the strangers with food and water. Undoubtedly, this is what makes Abraham's behavior the model of hospitality for the Jewish culture (Ex 6:4; Dt 26:5-22; Ps 105:23). What the Genesis 18 narrative exposes is the importance of being hospitable to one another regardless of the differences that the person might have rather than offering abuse and theological rhetoric. The researcher's Biblical Foundation will give hope, inspiration, encouragement, and comfort to all people in light of the church's stance on the mistreatment of its guests, members, and strangers. The New Bible Dictionary (NBD) records that hospitality is not just a practice, but, a way of life. However, it was a demonstration of faithfulness to God (Jb 31:32; Isa 58:7). One might have also entertained God (Gn 18:1-8).[3] The appropriate interpretation of this pericope highlights the three aspects of the Christian faith that many individuals will become empowered to see that 1) hospitality is unlimited (Gn 18:1-2); 2) hospitality is welcoming and receiving (Gn 18:3-8) and 3) hospitality is rewarding (Gn 18:9-15).

Genesis 18:1-15 details a rather cordial reception that is being held at Abraham and Sarah's tent by the oaks of Mamre. Abraham and Sarah had made preparations to entertain three strangers, who were guests, with a lavish feast. It is unknown who those three individuals were.[4] But, what is demonstrated in the text is the fact that Abraham and Sarah displayed gracious hospitality to, apparently, individuals who were not previously acquainted with them. Therefore, what Christians should glean out of this pericope is that the first aspect suggests that hospitality is unlimited. The significance of illustrating the

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[3]J. D. Douglas, ed., "Hospitality," *New Bible Dictionary,* 3rd ed. (England, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982).

[4]Gn 18:1-15. This epiphany occurs at *the oaks of Mamre*, namely, "a tree shrine at Mamre," a holy place (*Access Bible, NRSV*). The depiction of the deity is ambiguous. Is the Lord one among the *three men*? Or is the Lord symbolized by all three individuals?

strangers in this text is to point out how irrational behavior towards strangers or those who are considered different can sometimes lead to disunity, hatred, and bigotry in the kingdom of God but "Arguably, it is Abraham, the sojourner-recipient of the hospitality of the Canaanites, the Egyptians, those in Negeb and at Bethel, even in Melchizedek, king of Salem (Gn 14:18-19, of which more in a moment), who is able in turn to render hospitality to the three strangers (Gn 18)."[5]

What the text first points out is that in Genesis 18:1-2, Abraham extends unlimited hospitality to three men, who are unidentified and is said to have been complete strangers. Part of understanding how to develop a ministry of hospitality and mend the hiatus between the theory and practice of those persons, whether guests, members, or strangers is by being loving Christians through the Word of God. Christians show other individuals a glimpse of God's Word by the way Christians treat other individuals. Abraham's love for God and people enabled him to extend unlimited hospitality to not only his family and friends but to individuals that Abraham did not know. Diane C. Kessler, a graduate of Andover Newton Theological School, educator, ordained minister, and author also makes a claim reinforcing Genesis 18 and 19 as a text centered on the theme of hospitality and leads the readers to not only believe that the guests could have possibly been divine visitors but also strangers. This is what Kessler says in her defense,

> Genesis 18:1b-8 and 19:1-3 depict hospitality to complete strangers. Genesis 18:1a begins, "Then Yahweh appeared to him…" This opening phrase tells the reader that Yahweh is coming to Abraham in the form of the three men, so the reader knows all along that Abraham is dealing with the deity. Abraham himself,

[5]Andrew Arterbury, "Abraham's Hospitality among Jewish and Early Christian Writers: A Tradition History of Gen 18:1-16 and Its Relevance for the Study of the New Testament," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30, no. 3 (2003): 359-376.

> however, simply sees, receives and entertains the three strangers. He has no idea who they are. Only later does he realize that this is a divine visitation. Thus, his hospitality is not offered especially for divine representation, but simply for strangers who are passing by. Then in Genesis 18, Abraham and Sarah receive a blessing from God after the meal they have prepared. In ancient societies this was the possibility that reinforced hospitality. You never knew whether the stranger you were entertaining was a divine being (cf. the later New Testament reference to "entertaining angels unawares", Heb. 13:2). Such divine beings could be bearers of blessings or punishments (cf. the fates of Lot's family and of the inhabitants of Sodom in Genesis 19).[6]

Abraham and Sarah chooses to be affectionate and friendly instead of being unloving and hostile when encountering these visitors by creating an environment conducive to sharing in the blessings that God promises them. This is not the first time Abram (later called Abraham; Gn17:5, *Access Bible, NRSV*) shows his generosity to people of other nations. Genesis 14:19-24 records Abraham's great generosity of spirit where other families of the earth have benefited from his kindheartedness.[7]

Christian hospitality, based upon Biblical understanding, requires Christians to remove the limits that restrict Christians from reaching out to those other individuals; even in this context as strangers. As Merriam-Webster defines strangers, take notice how the definition is broad with no set boundaries. The text illustrates that everyone was once alienated from someone or something at some point, which connects the readers to these texts in Genesis 15:13 and Exodus 2:22, 18:3. Sociologically and historically, the contexts of the story of Abraham and Sarah were very important. Customarily because of Israel's nomadic practices, tribes did not associate with other strangers. This included other tribes or foreigners and likewise for other ethnicities. Abraham is often showed

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[6]Diane Kessler, *Receive One Another: Hospitality in Ecumenical Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 3-4.

[7]Gn 14:19-24. Also notes Abram again shows great generosity to people of other nations. He is a blessing to other families of the earth (12.3) (*Access Bible, NRSV*).

throughout Genesis as a nomad, wandering from place to place and most of the places where Abraham had settled were not welcoming. Abraham becomes the archetype to push hospitality. Kessler also adds,

> For various reasons, offering hospitality can give offence to one's neighbors. This Old Testament story reverberates in recent situations where, for example, people in "Anglo" neighborhood have reacted violently when one member of the neighborhood has entertained people who looked different. Hospitality to outsiders is risky precisely because it treats the guest as an insider; other insiders may feel that their own identity is being threatened by the crossing of boundaries.[8]

Therefore, the life of an Israelite, Ephraimite or any other ethnicity was a life of arduous toil because normally other tribes did not mix with other ethnicities and this is also understood even in Genesis 19. Classism and sexism were very prevalent during those times. A person of a different ethnicity dares not to be seen in public communicating with another who is of a different ethnic background, class, or gender. For example, Bruce Malina gives insights from cultural anthropology in his book, *The New Testament World*, by adding,

> Honor is always presumed to exist within one's own family of blood, that is, among all those one has as blood relatives. A person can always trust his blood relatives. Outside that circle, all people are presumed to be dishonorable-untrustworthy, if you will-unless proven otherwise.[9]

This is often viewed by other scholars as being part of the Old Testament culture as well. Such behavior was unheard of and anyone could have been found guilty of breaking all types of Mosaic codes and ostracized as a result—criticized and even put to death. The New Testament was no different from the Old Testament. Such accounts have even be recorded in other biblical stories even in the New Testament such as in John 3:1-

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[8]Kessler, *Receive One Another,* 3-4.

[9]Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2001), 36.

21(NIV) in the dialogue of Nicodemus, a Pharisee, who came to Jesus by night-which may signal Nicodemus desire for secrecy, his courage in coming to Jesus, or his lack of understanding Jesus[10]or in the dialogue of Jesus with a Samaritan Woman in John 4:1-42 (NIV) where similar behaviors were unheard of.

Hospitality has no set boundaries. When an individual creates set boundaries in whom an individual is to extend hospitality to then it forces only a certain group of individuals to develop a relationship with God. Is this the message that the church wants to send out- that hospitality is only extended to certain people? These historical accounts, along with Abraham and Sarah, challenges the norm and breaks traditional behavioral barriers of a sinful and dying world so that individuals may have an opportunity to receive a relationship with God and receive benefits from the Creator. This is an important spiritual agenda that the church should continue to maintain in extending hospitality.

In an ever-changing world, post modernity celebrates difference, diversity and otherness. In his book, *I Believe I'll Testify,* Dr. Cleophus LaRue, talks about his preaching journey in a black congregation and LaRue makes the distinction between stretching one's intellect and what moves an individual beyond the bounds of the impossible into the realm of the incredulous. The book continues to argue that in ordered for people to be of service to the church, as LaRue had done, individuals must venture out into the new and unchartered waters.[11] Moreover, Rudy Rasmus and Dottie Escobedo-Frank, are heroic evolutionists, whose theories have sparked modifications in the way

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[10]R. Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 134-137.

[11]Cleophus LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify* (Louisville. KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 13.

church does ministry today. Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank's book, *Jesus Insurgency,* believes that much of the division in the church has turned into a fighting club.[12] "They see us as narrow-minded and phobic (homophobe, femmephobe, ethniphobe, povertyphobe, and so on). People today think Christians talk what they are afraid to walk, while most people would rather do the walk even if they can not explain the talk," says Ramsus and Escobedo-Frank.[13] What Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank argues is that people see us fight over our expression of faith moreover than our general principle of acceptance as a way to get along with one another.

Nancy A. Hardesty says in her book, *Inclusive Language in the Church*, "We are two or three thousand years removed from the languages and cultures in which the text were written."[14] So, culturally, historically and even presently hospitality has been viewed as only being extended to certain people such as family and friends but here in Genesis 18:1-15, it begs to differ because Abraham and Sarah ventured out into new and unchartered waters by removing the limits and extending hospitality to strangers. Hospitality extends to even the least of these individuals. The least of these individual can not only be identified as strangers but also those who are oppressed, marginalized, discriminated against, ostracized, etc. Such scripture as Genesis 18:1-15 is bold, challenging and uncomfortable, especially in its morals because it teaches an ethical lesson on the way the church should be obligated to its guests, members, and strangers and that means being hospitable to one another.

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[12]Rudy Rasmus and Dottie Escobedo-Frank, *Jesus Insurgency: The Church Revolution from the Edge* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 13.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Nancy A. Hardesty, forwarded by Patrick D. Miller, *Inclusive Language in the Church* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987), 74.

Christine Pohl, in *Making Room*, discusses biblical basis of hospitality where Pohl pictures God as being a gracious host who provides manna and quail for the Israelites on their Exodus journey and Jesus as a gracious host welcoming children, prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners.[15] Genesis 18:1-2 exposes Christians to scriptural and biblical principles to empowerment by broadening hospitality boundaries. Removing the boundaries of hospitality pushes individuals to be hospitable to one another and to serve one another as stated in 1 Peter 4:8-10. Those who extend hospitality set the boundaries to which hospitality is given. Therefore, it has become incumbent upon Christians to remove the limits of hospitality as illustrated in the text by Abraham and Sarah because Christian hospitality is due even outside the perimeter of the individual's (host) family and friends.

The second important aspect that this text points out is the fact that hospitality is receiving and welcoming. Here in the text, Abraham initiates the hospitality and invites the strangers into his personal space. Nowhere in the text does it say that the strangers initiated the encounter. It is obvious that Abraham may have had some good Christian etiquette. Therefore, when the behavior of the person extending the hospitality is that of the God-like characteristic that Christians should possess then it makes hospitality more easily for others to be received and feel welcomed. The hospitality of Abraham and Sarah is largely due to their loving and charismatic leadership in stepping up to the plate to setting the tone as a model for others to exemplify. In Genesis 18:3-8, Abraham and Sarah is the epitome of hospitality with their friendliness, compassion and kindness to others. The effects of Abraham and Sarah's love and charm in verse 3-8 fascinated the

[15]Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 16-17.

strangers and prompt the strangers to be received and welcomed by Abraham and Sarah. The hospitality of individuals should be effective in a way that it makes other individuals received and welcomed into the presence of the Almighty God.

Kessler also adds in her studies,

> Hospitality to the stranger is uniquely human trait. Strangers always are vulnerable and dependent on the friendliness of those among whom they pass or settle. In the ancient world, anyone might become such a stranger, driven from home by drought, warfare, famine, or social marginalization. Perhaps that is why the practice of hospitality to strangers became a virtue. One offered, as one hoped to be offered, generous hospitality."[16]

Hospitality (ξενία), as a way of life, allows individuals to receive warm hearted-friendliness, welcome and acceptance into a place where God has declared individuals who were once either alienated or outcast, whether being male or female, young or old, heterosexual or homosexual, unimpaired or disabled, rich or poor, sick or healthy, multi-cultured or multi-religious, etc., by society are now special friends in the eyes of God. Kessler further writes as it relates to her topic on "Hospitality to the Religiously Excluded" that "…God here assures people who have been judged as second-class members of the community that they will be represented permanently in the very house of God."[17]

Think about it—how many times has the church or people have judged, excluded, and turned individuals around from receiving salvation, welcome and acceptance from God? "God's taking in of the faithful 'other' transforms the very house of God from the protected territory of a particular group into a universally recognized and used

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[16]Kessler, *Receive One Another,* 1.

[17]Ibid., 8.

sanctuary"[18] says Kessler. As Abraham and Sarah displays a hospitable spirit, it reinforces the importance of hospitality overall in the ecumenical church. Therefore, the expression that is inserted conveys that the church should not be overly zealous in exerting its power and authority over those throughout the church's ministries. In the text, Abraham and Sarah was not pompous and hostile, but yet humble and meek in every effort to exhibit the actions of a servant. As the host, Abraham and Sarah's actions became comfortable and readily accessible in communication of word and deed with the strangers as seen in verses 3-8.

Christian hospitality offers welcome and acceptance. It is not a mistake of the Christian identity but yet it is a systematic practice of the Christian culture. In an effort to make disciples of Christ, Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank, noted, "The problem is that our current structure prevents our mission from becoming reality."[19] Those who were once strangers and became welcomed in their settled environment, in the latter these sojourners were accepted and gained resident statuses. As a host, Abraham is responsible for laying out the welcome mat in the form of a celebratory feast or being a servant by washing the feet of the strangers who have traveled from afar (Gn 18:4; 18:8; 19:2; 24:32; Jdg 5:25; 19:21). When hospitality is offered, it welcomes and accepts those who have been outcast and offers transformation, hope, and inspiration amidst their pain.

Since hospitality encompasses also the spiritual needs of the host and strangers, there is no room to be close-minded. Abraham and Sarah's hospitality did not illustrate a close-minded approach as viewed in verse 3-8. Amy Oden is a Bell Associate Professor

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank, *Jesus Insurgency,* 16.

of Church History at Oklahoma City University and in the edition of *And You Welcomed Me,* Oden says, "Hospitality responds to the physical, social, and spiritual needs of the stranger."[20] In the text, Abraham and Sarah shared a physical table fellowship with the strangers as a sign of offering food and water. Table fellowship represents equality between the host and the strangers. Abraham and Sarah showed dignity and honor to the strangers. Food and rest were also offered by Abraham and Sarah to the strangers as spiritual needs. Oden expressed that their spiritual needs were met by prayers for healing, safe travel, and gratitude, were a common dependency for both the host and strangers. It also included worship, Eucharist, or other liturgical worship.[21] Helping the strangers who were identified by culture as outsiders was a social need that Abraham and Sarah displayed. This act of social need embraced inclusion and respect.[22] It also illustrated a commonality in humanity that all individuals share rather than dissimilarity, which depicts exclusion and discrimination.

For example, women have often been considered strangers as it relate to the being in the ministry. Women in leadership position during the early church have been somewhat of excluded from the pulpit. Karen Jo Torjesen writes from a feminist perspective on how some male individuals have not welcomed women at all in the political body of the church. Torjesen expounds on Tertullian, church father and theologian of the third century, says, "…the only proper roles for women lay within the

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[20]Amy Oden, ed., *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 14.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid.

private sphere."[23] This close-minded view by Tertullian is opposite of what Oden argues as a social need that Abraham and Sarah were envisioning as inclusion and respect.

Finally, the third aspect expresses in Genesis 18: 9-15 that hospitality is rewarding. Even if the three individuals were strangers to Abraham and Sarah, the general theorem implies that the individuals could have been representatives of the Lord. Had Abraham and Sarah chose the route of rejecting the strangers, then Abraham and Sarah would have illustrated dogmatism, hostility, and dissension, and this by far is inappropriate behavior at its worst. If Abraham and Sarah were awaiting imminent promises from God as the narrations indicates, then why would Abraham and Sarah neglect the onset of a great promise of success by taking risks through displaying bias behavior to people who could possibly lead them towards the promises of God? What God promises to Abraham as blessings were land, many descendents (great nation), and blessings to others of the earth (Gn 12:1-3). The text did not suggest how the blessings would come nor does it allude who else would lead Abraham and Sarah to these promises other than by God. Though God is sovereign, God inspires and continues to inspire others to be the catalyst to distribute the blessings.

What prompts Abraham and Sarah to advance beyond the dichotomy between theory and practice of a culture that did not integrate well with others is in knowing that God promises them rewarding favor. Genesis 12:1-3 records a conversation that the Lord has with Abram,

> Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and

[23]Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests* (New York, NY: HarperSan Francisco, 1993), 160.

> the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

In the genealogy story of Genesis, Abraham was born into a family line of promises by God; from Noah to Shem and then through ten generations to Abraham. In this story, Abraham and Sarah have become the focus as the leading ancestors of Israel. The Genesis story records other significant events that have contributed to major spiritual hurdles and reasons that prompts God to act on the behalf of Abraham and Sarah. Some very important events in this history include the death of Haran, the brother of Abraham—the lives of Isaac and Jacob, the sons of Abraham, becoming threatened, which left their parents, Abraham and Sarah, believing that Isaac and Jacob were dead—or the fact that Sarah, Abraham's wife is barren and cannot produce children. With all of these negative events occurring in the lives of Abraham and Sarah, God promised a host of descendants, who will be rich in many nations.

The hospitality of Abraham and Sarah in entertaining these representatives of God yielded social activity, fellowship and community as a sign of reward. Breaking societal barriers by way of extending hospitality has obliterated the negative stigma that was placed on society is what Abraham and Sarah did in this text. The strangers also played a significant role as well because of their bravery and courage in going against the grain in accepting the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah. This concept works both ways, which resulted in both parties', the hosts and the guests, advantages. These societal barriers involved gender, ethnic, religious, citizenship, and economic statuses but not limited to other social obstacles and embarrassments such as marginalization, discrimination, depreciation and segregation.

What Abraham and Sarah learned from the beginning of their ancestry was the true meaning of treating people as they would want to be treated. Had not Abraham and Sarah been hospitable, gracious, and sociable with their estranged guests, Abraham and Sarah would not have known that those men were sent by God to deliver a message of promise. The blessing was in the prophecy that was sent by their estranged guests. These guests brought a prophetic word to Abraham and Sarah, indicating that she will bare a son in her old age. This prophecy of the author will all come true as God blesses Abraham and Sarah with a child of promise, named Isaac.

In conclusion, what the Old Testament challenges individuals in Genesis 18:1-15 is to a ministry of hospitality in welcoming those who are identified as strangers, visitors, guests or aliens in society. Here the text acts in contrary to societal standards and traditions in Jewish customs. It offers several aspects to denote that hospitality is unlimited, receiving and welcoming and rewarding. Removing limitations opened up many avenues for Abraham and Sarah to be hospitable to three strangers. Abraham helped changed the way the community treated one another. What Abraham did to change the course of behavior in his community made him to be paradigm for the Christian community.

The fact that hospitality is receiving and welcoming is suggestive that it is not a practice but it is a constant way of life. Hospitality receives and welcomes those individuals physically, socially, and spiritually. People who were once marginalize, deprived, oppressed, ostracized, etc. are now accepted as a part of society, but, more importantly, a Christian society. Although, the community may be broken up into different customary beliefs, religious and social groups, God invites all individuals to a

corporate Christian culture that focuses on Christian hospitality. It will invoke the attitudes of both the host and strangers to conform to the standards of God.

After reading Genesis 18:1-15, the text explains that hospitality can be rewarding. Proffering hospitality invites God's blessings as depicted in the verse 9-15. After the warmhearted welcome, it was unbeknownst to Abraham and Sarah that the strangers had brought word that Sarah will one day bear a child in her old age. Other attributed blessings that were promised to Abraham by God were that Abraham was inherit land, a great nation of descendents and blessing to others on earth. God promised to make Abraham's name great (Gn 12:2). These blessings became instrumental within the context of bettering the community as a whole as well as for advancing the individual also. This was the covenant promise that God made to Abraham upon him leaving his homeland.

New Testament

Much of the growing antagonism between Jesus' believers and the Church is revealed in the Gospel of John. However, John 15:12-13 helped to raise the platform to building a community of diverse individuals through fostering hospitality in the midst of the hostility and hatred that do exist in the world in order to continue the ministry of Jesus. John the son of Zebedee, this beloved disciple, is the author of this Gospel who illustrated the sociological and historical context of the Johannine community existed in John and Jesus' world and culture. The Johannine community was the community in which John lived in. As John's anthology of Jesus' ministry was introduced in the Gospel, it is important to understand that as one of the Synoptic Gospels, John's literary works dated back before Matthew and Luke's accounts of Jesus' genealogy and miracles

and he dealt with God's creativity, purpose and the incarnation of Jesus.[24] Mitzi Minor, Professor of the Gospel of John Lectures, proposes that John's understanding of God came to humanity by way of Christ who was identified as the Word or *Logos* (Greek meaning) and that's how people developed an intrinsic connection with God because of the pedagogy of the Word. The revelation God gives to humanity cannot happen unless Christ is preached. Christ is the *logos* that are spoken. If Christ is the *logos,* then the questions raised are how important are the words or gospel message concerning what Christ has spoken or revealed to humanity? Are people guilty of making the Bible a theological debate that is abstruse? Well, John's theological theorem aided the readers in understanding genuinely how God united with humanity by way of Jesus who in essences is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1-14, *Accessed Bible*) and such understandings of God's unity with humanity fosters the spread of hospitality.[25]

As Jesus began to embark upon his ministry, Minor suggests that John's account unfolded the shame and honor concept ingrained in their culture, which continued to shape every person of the New Testament as well as today. The honor was public ascription and favorable state of being while the shame concept was not only the opposite of honor, but it was deemed the most unfavorable state of being. The shame concept usually involved some external mockeries, malicious belittling and doggerel comments from the public. Society labeled the honor concept, as being highly respected while on

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[24]Jn 1:1-18. 1-5: Also notes The relation of the Word to God and to creation.1-2 Echoes Gn 1.1 and positions the story of Jesus as a rereading of the creation story. The Gospel speaks of God telling the story of Jesus. *Word*: the active and revealing Word of God (Gn 1; Ps 33.6; Prv 8.22). In Judaism Word identified with Torah.

[25]Lecture by Mitzi Minor at the Memphis Theological Seminary Memphis Tennessee, January 2009.

the other hand while disgrace was the epithet for the shame concept.[26] Malina gives an example of honor by explaining how a father in a family commands his children to do something, and the children obey as God intended. Therefore, the children treat their father honorably.[27] However, a primary example of such biblical illustration of shame is emphasized in the Crucifixion of Jesus. A scholar, writer, and African American intellectual activist by the name of James Cone suggested in his book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* concerning Jesus' shame saying, "The paradox of a crucified savior lies at the heart of the Christian story…It was a public spectacle accompanied by torture and shame-one of the most humiliating and painful deaths ever despised by human beings…That Jesus died this way…"[28] Although, shame has not brought an extra dishonor on the family, it has brought a sense of shame on the individual from the very integrated customary beliefs of the person. Applied pressure and traditionalized customs has forced people to a point where individuals had to acclimate to the rubric of the present culture. So hence, people had to try to keep the status quo in place in order to feel apart and not experience similar treatment. The odd person usually became the catalysts for something. Minor contends that the persons at the bottom of the pyramid received no recompense for behaving in a manner dictated by society as being unsuitable and so those individuals at the lowest of the totem pole did not care about the status quo and had no reason to conform.[29] In this case, Jesus became the catalyst or agent that provoked significant change in the world even today. Is the church willing to go to the cross to

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[26]Ibid.

[27]Malina, *The New Testament World,* 30.

[28]James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 1.

[29]Mitzi, Lecture, Memphis Theological Seminary, 2009.

provoke change as Christ done? If so, then "…we must be willing to die. And we must acknowledge our own death. Our structures, our traditions, our preferences, our way of being, and our control must be set free to die"[30] says Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank.

During the First Century, the temple or synagogue was a place for worship while coexisting as a place where taxes were paid. Normally, the priest would not only get his share of taxes, but he would re-distribute the rest among as warranted. Most likely the poor were the least deserving in the First Century era. In a world where Jesus came to proclaim that the Kingdom of God has come, the priests and Romans were at an all time advantage while those who were poor beggars and peasants were at a disadvantaged by being on the low end of the structure. The poor were suffering and overlooked. Yet, still Jesus was hospitable and came to offer hope to those that were hopeless as well as to alleviate human hurt by presenting love as a model for believers. John 15:12-13 is not only a commandment but also an archetype for believers to modestly parade among the faith. Abiding in the love of Jesus is something that He commands the believers to do, which is encapsulated in verse 12 as *one* core command or order.[31] That charge is restated in John 13:34-35 as a new command that marks authentic Christian discipleship and "It is obvious that John has the crucial event of the death and resurrection of the Lord in mind as he states this major discipleship thesis from a post resurrection perspective."[32] This text calls Christians to be hospitable to new ideas, which Christians become readily receptive to three important principles: love, community, and inclusion.

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[30]Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank, *Jesus Insurgency,* 21.

[31]V. P. Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1972), 132-43.

[32]G. Borchert, "The Resurrection Perspective in John: An Evangelical Summons", *RevExp* 85 (1988): 65-78.

"These verses immediately call to mind the double command discussed in the Synoptic Gospels wherein the summary of the law is stated in terms of loving God and loving one's neighbor (cf. Mk 12:29-31)."[33] How does an individual come to love God and love one's neighbor? As the text regarding this pericope began to expound on John's Gospel, the author showed how Jesus demands complete and unquestioning obedience as it is related to the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses. Here Jesus insisted to the rich man in the following passages of scriptures (Mt 19:16-30; Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-30) that the way to love and honor God is by conforming to God's commandments. Jesus presents a situation to the rich man whereby the rich man has to make a decision to keep God's commandments if he wants eternal life. Here lies in that text an undisclosed sense of hospitality by Jesus who offers the rich man an admission into the kingdom of God. When a person has strived to love in accordance with God's commandments, then Jesus will recognize the person's sincerity as seen in the other Synoptic Gospel just as Jesus saw in the rich man's sincere commitment to want to serve God. Since Jesus is a part of the Trinity according to Christian pedagogy and with God in the beginning as stated in John 1:2, the emphasis of this Gospel are placed more on establishing a welcoming relationship with Jesus, the true vine (God's vine) and concentrates on an effort of love for others out of obedience to God, which is the first principle that this scripture demystifies. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (NIV). Jesus is suggesting that in order for him to remain in humanity and humanity in him then

[33] *The New American Commentary*: John12-21, "The Friends of Jesus and the Love Command: Thesis Statement on Discipleship (15:12-17)," 149.

man/woman must continue to bear this fruit from his tree…LOVE… which is one of the fruits of the spirit that is highlighted in Ephesians 2:7, NIV, also.

The New American Commentary: John 12-21 denoted in its literature how the text shifts from the Israel's daily affirmation of the *Shema* (Dt 6:4-5) to the focus on a relationship with Jesus.[34] Minor concludes that John illustrated God as the vine grower, Jesus as the vine and the Followers as the branches. The followers of Jesus were told to have the words of Jesus to abide (*meno*) in them (Jn 15:4) and in his love (Jn 15:9), which only happened through keeping his commandments (Jn 15:10).[35] In this illustration, there was a great sense of interdependence and mutuality in this image. "God's reconciling love in the cross empowered human beings to love one another-bearing witness with 'our whole being in the struggle against evil, whatever the cost'."[36] This promotion of reconciliation that God offers people to love one another by their love of the cross is encouraging hospitable treatment to one another.

John wrote a picturesque Gospel of what Christian love (ξενία) is through the life of Jesus. How Christian love is defined and practiced is foretold throughout the New Testament. Principle guidelines to how Christians should love others as a rule, goal, and virtue are direct reflections of Christian living. *Eros*, *philia*, and *agape* love are three types of love most identified by Christians. *Eros* (ἔρως) can be summed as erotic love; *philia* (φιλία) can be described as friendly love and *agape* is unconditional love. Therefore, according to the text, *agape* (ἀγάπη) love is the centrality of the Christian life

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[34]Ibid.

[35]Lecture, Minor, Memphis Theological Seminary, 2009.

[36]Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* 70.

(Jn 13:34; 15:12). Jesus defined Christian love in many approaches as a way that Christians ought to love as he loved. What is unstated in John 15:12 is the actual word, *agape* love. It is not difficult to infer in John 15:12 that *agape* love is the most widely needed approached as it is related to the Christian ethics in this commandment. John 15:12 extrapolated that love as the Golden Rule or the Christian duty.

Expressing *agape* love as it is intended in the Christian way has illustrated the godliness of the Christian lifestyle. God is seen in the Christian because of who God is and God is love. How is God love? Simply in the fact that God gave up Jesus to the cross in itself signified the love of God. The love of God gladly embraces the transformation of the converts and caused the converts to emulate the Creator. This is what Peter Rollins, a radical and controversial author of the book, *Insurrection*, had to say:

> To experience is to encounter *something.* But in the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection we discover that God is not something that we encounter directly and thus is not something that we experience. Rather, God is that which transforms how we experience everything, i.e., love. God is the name we give to the way of living in which we experience the world as worthy of living for, fighting for, and dying for…Traditionally we are brought to love the world because we love God and God loves the world. But once we embrace the understanding of God testified to in Christ, the middle reference that stands between us and the world dissolves entirely; we no longer love the world because God loves it, but rather we simply love the world and, in doing so, express our love for God.[37]

Secondly, when Christians do more than is expected of them in terms of offering love to others—then community can develop as an expression of the Christian faith. God had set out to enunciate the basic principles of building a community through love. This community consists of a relationship between, God, the Son and the followers. In this community, only love abides in obedience to the commandments by God. As stated in

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[37]Peter Rollins, *Insurrection* (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2011), 123.

Romans 13:10, "Love does no wrong to your neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the Law" (*Accessed Bible, NRSV*). That is the essence that is exhibited on the cross by Jesus. Although, Christ was crucified and hung on a cross, the love of Jesus to those that did wrong was one that was forgiving. It was not a love of retribution, as many people would feel, but a love that is welcoming to forgive. Once community is formed, there is a greater need to be Christ-like because God is ever present in the community. Thereby, all of creation has become a worshipping community and a community of the governance of God. One must be embracing, willing and obedient to the opportunity to forgive one another in love. Rollins added, "In other words, the claim *I believe in God* is nothing but a lie if it is not manifest in our lives, because one only believes in God insofar as one loves."[38] Displaying *agape* love as Christians should is love as emphasized herein the scripture even to the point of loving those who despitefully use and mistreat others, including enemies. Cone argued against racism and black oppression in his book, and the stories Cone gave of the lives affected in such physical and spiritual struggles were transmuted into works of triumph, beauty, hope and resurrection. All this was attributed from Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.[39]

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as John15:12-13 envisioned hoped for a beloved community in which it would unify the body of Christ by way of friendship with the believers. The Christian community must be willing to love and willingness must denote that all individuals who are a part of the unified body of Christ must be ready to be offered, enthused about evangelizing, eager to draw believers and unbelievers,

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[38]Ibid., 127.

[39]Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* 69.

motivated to do ministry, and reluctant to turn back. Now that in itself is hospitality. What John 15:12 has commanded exhibits such tenacity that every individual must pave the way to be hospitable in showing love and becoming Willing Workers in the kingdom of God.

R. Brown, author of his second volume book called *The Death of the Messiah*, used 1 John 3:16 to suggest that individuals have come to know true love because Jesus laid down his life for all.[40] The word all has described everyone in the community. Here in this text, all persons are afforded the opportunity to be received by Christ. How does one display true love as conveyed by R. Brown in a community? Well, in order for one to convey true love in a *comm-unity*, it must be displayed in the behavior of the person, communication of the person, giving of the person, and imparting of the person. The behavior of the person in the community is *epito-mized* by how members of the community love one another. This is a leading model that Jesus displayed for his followers to exhibit by giving of himself. On the other hand, Rollins explained that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was ready and willing to lose everything for God.[41]

This statement was the same even for the Johannine community, those Judeans who believed in Jesus based upon the teachings of John, as well as for society today. The believer must be like Christ—ready and willing to lose everything for God. This included, even if an individual was labeled as the odd person in a group and that individual was treated inhospitably then that person must take a stand for justice and equality, which means that that person must being willing to risk it all for the sake of

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[40]R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah,* 2 vols. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994).

[41]Rollins, *Insurrection*, 26.

Christ. Although love was not specifically identified in the statement of Rollins, however, one can infer that love can be one of the major reasons why self-sacrificing decisions of Jesus were to give up everything for God on the cross in the community. The willingness to lay down the life of an individual for a friend was the description of Jesus for the greatest form of Christian love in a community.

Love may be easy to talk and sing about but, what does love call forth from the person when it speaks on inclusivity, especially when inclusivity is characterized as all-embracing? So, lastly, the text indicated the need for inclusion. God is a God of universalism and not individualism. Christians are to love because of the quality of the Christ-like character that Christians share and this Christ-like character is one that is inclusive to all. Robert Jamieson in his book, *The Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible,* explained it like this in John 13:34-35, "Christ's love to His people in giving His life a ransom for them was altogether new, and consequently as a Model and Standard for theirs to one another."[42] Christians are to exhibit loving qualities as individuals are empowered by the love of God and grace to display loving characteristics to one another. The Apostle Paul stated to the Corinthians, "And now faith, hope, love abide, and these three; and the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13, *NRSV*).

How should Christians love others as described in the text that has been excluded? The answer is given as commanded. Dr. Pete Gathje, Associate Dean for Curriculum and Instruction, Professor of Christian Ethics argues when Christians obey the directive by

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[42]Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible,* (1871).

God then love has to become self-sacrificed.[43] It is a love with no thought of receiving in return. Love will cause the Christian to make sacrifices and when one sacrifices, that is because of love. The text suggested that Christian love should mirror the love of Christ, which was embodied on the cross. For Christ died for all persons. It is a love that while still sinners; Christians were reconciled to God according to Romans 5:8; 10.

In fact, the text not only gives a clear illustration how John remembered that in loving God, he must also love his neighbor, but what is also shown in this passage of scripture is that the friendship that people shared is exhibited because John kept the command to love. *Holman New Testament Commentary: John* explained, "Sometimes Christians get so busy figuring out how they should be loving God that they forget to love one another. In fact, a constant and genuine love for one another would be one way to show love for God."[44] Loving one another is inclusive to being hospitable to everyone and is essential for doing ministry. It has been used as the charged for all followers of Christ to exemplify as their behavior. As an example of emulation, God and Jesus reflected love and Christians as well as all persons should embody the qualities of such said trait that exemplified that virtue. Merrill Tenney, profound writer who wrote *The Gospel of John*: Expositor's Bible Commentary, made a critical comment noting

> Unity instead of rivalry, trust instead of suspicion, obedience instead of self-assertion must rule the disciples' common labors. The measure of their love for one another is that of his love for them…which, would be further demonstrated by his forthcoming sacrifice.[45]

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[43]Lecture by Dr. Pete Gathje at Memphis Theological Seminary Memphis Tennessee, January 2010.

[44]Kenneth Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary: John*. "B. Affection in the Body (15:9-17)." ed. by Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 285.

[45]Merrill C. Tenney, "The Gospel of John" *Expositor's Bible Commentary,* vol. 9. ed., Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 153.

The New American Commentary: John 12-21 wrote, "God not only loved the disciples but loves the world and gave his Son for its people (cf. 3:16); but many in the world love darkness and do not do the will of God (cf. 3:19; 14:24)."[46]

Therefore, according to the last point, the world is inclusive rather than exclusive and this significantly has been illustrated in Bishop Carlton Pearson's book, *The Gospel of Inclusion*. He expressed that he has discovered that individuals love God but contradict that same love in their minds through the process of exclusion. This by no means is exhibiting hospitable treatment to one another. His theological position has become tantamount to falling into grace rather than falling from grace because of his teachings on Inclusion. Even when he preached the redemptive work on the Cross, he continued to express that it is an essence of Inclusion.[47] Pearson further added, "Jesus was a magnet for sinners and those marginalized to the fringes of society." Such people were drawn to Him by His love, as seen in Luke 15:1-7:

> Now the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable. "Suppose one of you has one hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over the one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.[48]

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[46]*The New American Commentary*: John12-21. "The Friends of Jesus and the Love Command, Thesis Statement on Discipleship (15:12-17)," 146-147.

[47]Bishop Carlton Pearson, *The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching Beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God and Self* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2006), 25-26.

[48]Ibid., 37.

In closing another intellectual penman, Leonard Sweet of *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, wrote in his book, *Real Church in a Social-Network World,* "To save the world we don't need the courage of our convictions. We need the courage of our relationships…especially the courage of a right relationship with the Creator, the creation and our fellow creatures."[49] People, including Christians, can be really cruel sometimes and as a result schisms of inhospitable treatment have been created in the church, which caused enormous church hurt and splits between church leaders and the laity. What has caused the people in the church to heal from the pains and unforgiving mistreatments is the fact that individuals in the church need to exhibit more hospitality by means of loving each other, building Christian communities and embracing inclusivity that Christ has intended for those to follow as directed in John15:12. Bishop Pearson quotes Martin Luther King, Jr., "We must all learn to live together as brothers, or we will all perish together as fools."[50] It is a devotion that even Jesus had for those whom had sentenced him to death on a cross; a passion that Christ was willing to forgive the sins of those who even wanted to remain with him in Paradise.

If people want to have a right relationship with God and be followers of Christ, then Rollins suggested, in paraphrasing, people have got to be prepared to walk a difficult and often dangerous path if individuals wish to invite the people into this murky and uncertain world, for in doing so people bring to the surface a whole host of anxieties that people spend so much of their time and resources repressing…But to truly unplug

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[49]Leonard Sweet, *Real Church in a Social-Network World: From Facebook to Face-to-Face Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2011).

[50]Pearson, *The Gospel of Inclusion,* 21.

from the God of religion, with all the anxieties and distress this involves, takes courage. Indeed, one could say that it takes God.[51] In his book *The Courage to Be,* Paul Tillich, a great theologian, wrote, "The courage to be as a part is the courage to affirm one's own being by participation."[52] As a Christian or a Follower of Christ, one must be able to participate in hospitality and in the suffering of Christ by speaking what thus says the Lord-and that is love, community, and inclusion. Prophetic preaching should be alluded to individuals that the love of Christ is hope that will help bring an end to church hurt by bridging the gap to bring others into a loving relationship with God.

"The mind is capable of believing anything," says John Savage.[53] Therefore, it is the deep belief system that drives a person's behavior argues Savage[54] and if a person holds true to what is directed then love is not an option as indicated in John 15:12, but a commandment and Christ expected His disciples to be an example of love nurtured by hospitality. It is God's will that Christians bring honor and not shame to the disadvantaged as exhibited in the First Century era. Christians are not exempted from displaying similar love that was displayed on the Cross at Calvary. The power of love has helped to build a community of unbelievers into a community of believers. It can transform the homophobia of the church, present liberation to the oppressed, a voice for the invisible, and friendliness to the beloved community into a spirit of acceptance, whereby, the vicissitudes of poverty, socio-statuses, sexuality, religious inequalities, genders of the person, the strangers, ailing, the prisoners, etc., should not be the basis of a

[51]Rollins, *Insurrection,* 16-17.

[52]Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952), 90-91.

[53]John Savage, *Listening & Caring Skills: A Guide for Groups and Leaders* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 117.

[54]Ibid.

love or hate decision. But, rather the welcomed person can develop a loving relationship with God, be loved, ministered to, and have all full rights as any other membership

Historical Foundation

Hospitality has played a central role in the history of early Christianity. As Christianity began to expand from Jerusalem across the far reaches of the world to the Roman empires, so was the need for hospitality to be extended as well. In some of the biblical stories mentioned in the Bible, hospitality has been the most common theme surrounding many of the stories told. For example, in the Genesis story of Abraham and Sarah in chapter 18 or in the Sodom and Gomorrah story in chapter 19, it is evident that hospitality was exhibited when these individuals took the guests into their home and made them feel welcomed. Although, some people may argue that Genesis 19 suggest the city of Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed because of sexual immorality. However, Anthony Robinson, in his book *Transforming Congregational Culture*, "The judgment of God comes down on Sodom and Gomorrah—not, as some have argued, because of sex, but because of a failure of hospitality. The citizens of those famous cities abused the guests and strangers in their midst."[55] In these two stories when no one else would welcome these strangers into their city, Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18 and Lot in Genesis 19 greeted their guest and offered them food, water, and rest.

Many followers of Christ began to spread the news concerning Christianity and the price of Christianity has resulted in many repeated outbursts of horrible state persecutions that produced many mentions of martyrs for Christ; those who died by sacrificing and suffering torture for their beliefs. The focus was on what was behind the

[55]Anthony Robinson, *Transforming Congregational Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 108.

persecutions. What was important to remember is that the Roman Empire tolerated many religions, yet there were aspects to Christianity that the Roman world simply could not abide. Since there was a need to spread the good news it was important that those divine messengers who were carrying the message of Christ be safeguarded against those state persecutions. Thus, hospitality has become such a major topic in early Christianity.

Christian traditions to some degree have not always presented hospitality as a top priority and that can be seen in how Lot was treated at the city gate in Genesis 19. In some instances, hospitality has been placed in the background rather than in placed in the limelight to proffer some form of courtesy. With that being said, this is one reason why hospitality has become so significant because individuals have gained an interest in hospitality. Hospitality began to make its way into the Christian culture by way of morals and practical expressions from individuals within their own Christian community. And, thus, this has become the foundation to birthing a new culture in the Christian community.

Oden explains what the Christian biblical meaning of hospitality is defined as. "At the very least, hospitality is the welcoming of the stranger *(hospes)*."[56] Traditionally, hospitality has been used to show how families and friends extend love and or treat one another; however, as it concerns the Christian biblical and historical perspective, hospitality was centered on receiving those who were considered one of the following: alien, stranger, visitor, and or guest. The way hospitality was exhibited to these individuals was by the way the host took care of the stranger. In early Christianity, the host tried to meet almost every aspect of the stranger's need whether if it was individual,

[56]Interestingly, language itself provides the strong connection between host and guest. In Latin *hospes* can refer to either host or guest. The Greek *xenos* carries the same double meaning, as does *hôte* (French) and *ospite* (Italian).

social, emotional, physical, and or a spiritual need. Some biblical accounts illustrate the very essences of what hospitality is. Matthew 26:17-30, Luke 22: 14-28, and Mark 14:12-25, record the disciples preparing the Passover meal during their last supper with Jesus. Here in these texts Jesus is hosting a messianic feast whereby he and his guests (the twelve disciples) will partake in the last supper with Jesus.

What Jesus was doing when he exhibited hospitality to the disciples was showing that he was willing to give up his life for his family (the twelve disciples) and His immediate family. There was a lot that Jesus was demonstrating in his endeavor to be an example of what his ministry was all about. In early Christianity many individuals were not trying to make sacrificial gifts of this magnitude—giving up one's life. However, Jesus was a leaving proof that the giving up of one's life can be a hospitable act. What Jesus was demonstrating in his unselfish act was the fact that hospitality can be rewarding. Oden adds, "Hospitality, then, is always a spiritual discipline of opening one's own life to God's life and revelation."[57]

One way of extending hospitality can include helping the needy or making the poor feel accepted and welcomed. When an individual feeds the homeless, delivers hot meals or pass out clothes and gives to those in need then this is an extension of hospitality by addressing the physical need. Individuals who are extending hospitality are taking on the role as a servant. This is a true example of the Christ-like character that Jesus exhibited during the era of early Christianity. Being a servant leader was very demanding because of the individual's obedience to Christ. Servant leaders were not only hospitable but servant leaders were also providing a service for the Lord.

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[57]Amy G. Oden, ed., *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 15.

Even as the Christian church was formed, the earliest of the new converts were Jewish proselytes. These individuals would generally continue to fulfill their obligations to those who were poor. This became evident when the early Church had established deacons as an official position in the Christian church in Acts 6:3. The role of deacon was to ensure an equitable and kindhearted treatment of those widows who were in need.

Rodney Starks writes in his book, *The Rise of Christianity*,

> When the New Testament was *new,* these were the norms of Christian communities. Tertullian claimed: "It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another!" (Apology 39, 1989 ed.)…the duties of deacons as outlined in the Apostolic Constitutions…show that they were set apart for the support of the sick, infirmed, poor, and disabled: "They are to be doers of good works, exercising a general supervision day and night, neither scorning the poor nor respecting the person of the rich."[58]

Since the early centuries of Christianity, hospitality has been absolutely necessary. It was needed in order to establish a friendship or fellowship of brother and sisterhood. It offered friendship, love, strength, acceptance, support, fellowship, relaxation and refreshments. People within their own community would open up their homes to those strangers. For example, during the early monastic period, emphasis of hospitality was placed on the visitors said Kessler. "Monasteries were primarily communities of monastics whose lives centered upon regular prayer offered for the church and for the world. At the same time, monasteries often were the destination of pilgrims who sought spiritual nourishment or guidance. They also were a safe place of rest for weary

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[58]Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscured, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 87.

travellers."[59] This was a primary way for the monasteries to build relationships with those pilgrims who was seeking some type of guidance.

St. Benedict of Nursia (c.480-c.547), a Christian saint in the Roman Catholic Church, felt the need for hospitality in the monastic communities. Under St. Benedict's rule he declared that pilgrims and travellers be welcomed and honored by monasteries. Monasteries practiced hospitality and the monasteries became witnesses to the gospel. Benedict addressed the monks in the monastery by saying, "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed by Christ. Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims because in them more particularly is Christ received." Benedict further expounded on affirming the relationship between Christ and the guest by stating, "All humility should be shown in addressing a guest. Christ is to be adored in them because he is indeed welcomed in them." [60]

Many responsibilities began to fall on the church as a result to the change that was occurring in the 4th and 5th century eras. Hospitality started to change and more focus on the spiritual need rather than on the physical need. The spiritual aspect of hospitality has been vastly on the rise of helping to voice moral concerns since early Christianity. What the early Christians were voicing was that "...whether we are guest or host we must be ready, ready to welcome, ready to enter another's world, ready to be vulnerable."[61] This type of spiritual need of hospitality suggests that an individual must be ready to participate as Christ has welcomed individuals into God's world.

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[59]Kessler, *Receive One Another,* 20.

[60]Ibid., 20-21.

[61]Oden, *And You Welcomed Me,* 15.

Although human beings are social, people have always been dependent upon one another for care. People are obligated to be hospitable even if individuals cannot be hospitable. An individual's character shapes who the person really is and the person's experience. Jesus commands Christians to love in John 13:34 and Jesus shadows the taboo. Even in Luke 14:12-14, here Jesus includes those individuals who are excluded and this in itself is an act of hospitality. Over the course of time hospitality has drifted from a moral sense to more of a spiritual action to the point that the participants have taken on a stance of courage, gratitude and radical openness as it relates to the hospitable treatment of others. Such readiness and willingness to give up one's life as an act of hospitality has exhibited throughout early Christianity in the lives of many of the Old Testament and New Testament characters.

Individuals who are involved in hospitality, a de-centering of perspective occurs.[62] The host and the guest experience a new encounter under the act of hospitality. Relationships are developed and so is the act of repentance. What occurs here in this paradigm shift is that a transformation takes place in the individual as well as in the life of the community at large. A behavior change is seen through those participating in hospitality. "As communities become more hospitable they experience a de-centering of perspective, too: they become more aware of the structural inequalities that exist in and around the, and repent."[63]

The hospitable praxis of the early Christians has shown that the good deeds that were performed throughout the community have impacted the citizens of the

[62]Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary,* trans. Erazim V. Kohak (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 126.

[63]Thomas Olgetree offers an insightful discussion of the way hospitality reveals the moral bankruptcy of the community's / one's frame of reference and leads to repentance. See pp. 1-10.

commonwealth. "Abraham and Sarah welcome the strangers under the oaks of Mamre (Gn 18:19). Rahab welcomes and protects the stranger spies from Joshua's army (Jo 2). The widow of Zarephath gives her all to the stranger prophet, Elijah (1 Kgs 17:8-24)."[64] In these biblical accounts, hospitality was imperative among many households and resourceful for strangers. Hospitality has empowered the community to embrace the presence of God and carry out the biblical duties of hospitality as described throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. Such scriptures like Genesis 18:1-15 demonstrates hospitality overall as Abraham welcomes and receives the strangers under his tent. These divine messengers come to bring word that Sarah is to give birth at her age to a son named Isaac. This is in itself creating a beloved community whereas strangers who are unacquainted with one another are able to commune together in the very presence of God as a sign of grace.

During early Christianity, it was not common for people to be hospitable to one another. When some groups of ethnicities would come together it was frown upon when an outsider would invade their community with their presence and culture. This was considered to be an unwarranted infringement. In Genesis 19:1-29, the Sodom and Gomorrah story were cities without honor. There was no one at the city's gate to welcome the strangers, except the stranger, Lot, who offers hospitality. The residents did not offer hospitality but Lot does. Lot as a resident alien or outsider dishonors Sodom by his offer of hospitality.[65] These historical accounts, along with Abraham and Sarah,

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[64]Oden, *And You Welcomed Me,* 19.

[65]Gn 19:1-11. Also notes The wickedness of Sodom. The generous hospitality that the visitors received from Abraham and Sarah in 18.1-15 contrasts sharply with the incredible lack of hospitality shown by the inhabitants of Sodom.

challenges the norm and breaks traditional behavioral barriers of a sinful and dying world so that individuals may have an opportunity to receive a relationship with God and receive benefits from the Creator. This is an important spiritual agenda that the church should continue to maintain.

Hospitality was not viewed as a desirable practice. However, other cultures in early Christianity were favorable of this treatment. Oden explains in her book, "The ancient cultures from which Christianity drew most heavily, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, all valued hospitality highly."[66] Ancient Hebrew who considered themselves to be God's chosen people,[67] were wandering nomads, out in the wilderness, in search for the Promised land. Oden adds, "It is no surprise, then, that Mosaic Law speaks to the proper attitude to 'strangers and sojourners among us,' providing inclusion in the community and specific protections as well."[68] In the Hebraic culture, hospitality was expressed as acceptance or welcome rather than a farewell or disagreement. In the Greek culture, "…ancient Greeks considered hospitality a basic feature of a civilized people which distinguished them from more primitive cultures that succumbed to xenophobia, or fear of strangers."[69] Hospitality was given in Greek culture as a way to offer protection to the strangers. Not only were the strangers given protection but Greek gods were given coverage as well.

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[66]Oden, *And You Welcomed Me,* 17.

[67]Pohl, *Making Room*, 27-29.

[68]Oden, *And You Welcomed Me,* 17.

[69]Ladislaus Bolchazy, *Hospitality in Early Rome: Livy's Concept of Its Humanizing Force* (Chicago, IL: Ares Publishers, 1977), 1.

The New Testament passages in the Bible referenced hospitality influences. "Put succinctly, the hospitality of God manifest in Jesus the anointed one in Luke is now extended through the early church in Acts by the power of the same Holy Spirit.[70] The Apostle Paul in Acts 1:8 speaks of the Holy Spirit, which plays a part as a divine guest residing in the lives of the Believers while empowering the body of Christ as witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is the representation of God's hospitality.

A new emergence of hospitable practices has sprung forth in re-visioning Christian theologies of religions today. Hospitality is trying to bridge the gap in the world where many faiths are prevalent in society. Recent ideological programs have manifested concerning the multicultural and multi-religious America. "...two trends that are at work: a progressive trajectory wishing to preserve the constitutionally guaranteed rights of religion and conscience that emerged out of America's founding by refugees and immigrants seeking such freedoms, and a conservative mentality seeking to focus on retrieving and emphasizing the Judeo-Christian legacy of the founding fathers of the nation."[71] The modern multicultural and multi-religious communities are fortifying while the ancient Judeo-Christian tradition is diminishing and relieving society of its flourishing diversity.

Those individuals of the progressive faith have been using hospitality as a means to reach the multicultural and multiracial families. It is an effort to encompass the transracial adoption that is currently on the rise as the new millennium continues to

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[70]This motif of hospitality is evident throughout Acts; see Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), esp. 127-28, 134-35, 314-15, 324-25, 330-31, 452-53, 510-11, and passim.

[71]Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 30.

develop. Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques' book, *Cultural Change and Your Church,* talks about how the history of America has evolved to growing more culturally diverse. John F. Kennedy, more than forty years ago, called the United States as "a nation of immigrants."[72] Immigrants have become a vast growing population of people who are migrating from all over the world to different areas of the continents to take up residence in countries such as the United States, Canada, and Western Europe because of wars, civil unrest, famine, and strife. In chapter one entitled "Kaleidoscope America," Pocock suggests that "The promise of freedom, security, and prosperity all serve as magnets to draw people [immigrants] to America and the West."[73]

As immigration began to become the new face of the country, the United States has taken own a different identity, especially being that it is one of the richest nations in the world. It has been noted that the first immigrants or sometimes called Anglo people migrated mainly from Europe; however, immigrants were coming from everywhere. Until the 1960s, America had a relatively homogeneous look, says Pocock and this was due to the changes in the socio-political theories and immigration policy.[74] The assimilation of the immigrants was somewhat of a difficult task for many of the Americans, especially for many Christians and local churches who did not want to adapt to ethnic groups made up of immigrants or their descendants. It became very obvious that many Americans were resisting and even being unfriendly to the newcomers who were attempting to become a part of their community.

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[72]John Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants* (New York, NY: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1958).

[73]Michael Pocok and Joseph Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church: Helping Your Church Thrive in a Diverse Society*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 16.

[74]Ibid.

What has grown to help shape the American chorography were the Hispanics who currently constitutes the make-up of most of the immigrants in the United States. The name Hispanic" was not used as the term to call those immigrants who had migrated from Latin America to the United States until the mid-twentieth century. Conquistadors were the former name used to identify the Hispanics. The conquistadors were Spanish speakers who occupied Florida and much of the entire region of the southwestern part of the United States during the 1500s. Since the assimilation of immigrants in America, the 1990 census has recorded at least thirty million Hispanics and more recently that numbers has increased to thirty-four million in 2000 says Pocock.[75]

There is no differentiation of values as it relates to Americans and Hispanics. As a matter of fact, both ethnicities have some behavior that is symptomatic of their character. As it relates to their Christian beliefs and indigenous culture, "often their [Hispanics] values are even stronger in areas of family and faith."[76] As strangers, Hispanics faced vulnerability in traveling from their homeland. However, without Christian beliefs, social, ethnic and domestic ties, Hispanic immigrants would have become targets of intercultural and interracial negativism. As it relates to identity matters, Joseph Henriques says, "We call these forces *ethnocentrism, nationalism,* and *traditionalism.*"[77] These forces can have both positive and negative implications. Admirably, these three forces illustrate how other individuals can display their concern for the welfare of others. On another note, adversely, one major issue concerning these forces leads to injurious

[75]Ibid., 17.

[76]Pocok and Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church,* 18.

[77]Ibid., 36.

attitudes of others, like the Americans, by simply exhibiting prejudicial biases towards immigrants, which suggest, for example, that the American culture, national heritage, and traditions were superior to the immigrants.

Not only was this type of inhospitable behavior prevailing in the community but it also transpired in the Christian church. At times, even the interactions between the different cultures were sometimes both positive and negative existing in the areas of ethnocentrism, nationalism, and traditionalism as well. Some church parishioners became zealous and were proselytizing international foreign students to conform to the church's evangelical traditions, for instances. The essence of ethnocentrism is the belief that certain things are right and good.[78] Ethnocentrism becomes the tendency in us to believe that our culture's value and norms of right and good are absolute; this tendency uses our values and norms as the standards against which to judge and measure all other cultures.[79] This is an ongoing criticism even today regarding individuals, such as church parishioners, for their ethnocentric bias against immigrants. Henriques argues in chapter two, "Whether right or wrong, the nature of ethnocentrism can lead us to at least three assumptions about those in the community who are of a different culture: (1) Their [international friend] culture is inferior to ours; (2) they need to see and do things as we do; and (3) there probably isn't that much difference between us anyway. Such assumptions suggest both ignorance and arrogance…"[80]

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[78]Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1972).

[79]Scofield Memorial Church, Dallas, Texas, partners with SIM Inc., formerly the Sudan Interior Mission. The latter now focuses on North America as well as their historic operations in Africa. Dr. Terrill Nelson guides SIM's Ethnic Focus Ministry in North America. Contact SIM Inc., P.O. Box 7900, Charlotte, NC 28241-7900.

[80]Pocok and Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church,* 40.

Nationalism can be best defined as the allegiance that an individual has to either their nation or ethnic affiliation. For those individuals born as citizens in their country, for them, nationalism can be at the very core a specific value for them. But, for those who are immigrants, can this statement be true? For those foreign-born individuals who came to the United States to gain citizenship, more immigrants have entered the United States in the 1990s.[81] The immigration policy of the United States has raised many eyebrows from both Americans and immigrants concerning the acceptance of immigration. "Many native-born Americans have low tolerance for immigrants…"[82] says Henriques and therefore, many individuals do not believe that immigrants desire similar and equal protection under the law as those who are native born Americans. This sound contrary to the American ideology on inalienable rights to equality, liberty, and opportunity that everyone is said to have as it suggests in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. However, here lays the real debate concerning Christians ethics for many who are Christians in the United States, "…not whether a nation…has a legal right to protect its borders or to determine whom it wants or does not want to let in…the real question for the church is, How shall we, as God's people, treat the foreigner, the alien, in this land?"[83] This has become a topic in many churches who are trying to define and understand their role as it relate to Christian praxes, especially since many immigrants in

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[81]Edward Retta, "The Hispanic Evangelical Agenda" (presentation made to the ministry at Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996), 4.

[82]Pocok and Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church,* 45.

[83]Mark Jobe, "Rethinking the Church to Reach the City," in *A Heart for the City*, ed. John Fudor (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1999), 204. Interview, 17 April 2001. Jobe said attendance in March 2001 had reached 1,700.

their congregation and community, who are either Hispanic, Asian, Jewish, Nigerian, Cuban, Dominican, etc., do not feel accepted even in the church.

Traditionalism has often been the catalyst that has led to many volatile outbreaks and protest against cultural identity. Tradition has been the part of the cause to a dying nation. For example, in Elaine M. Flake's book, *God In Her Midst*, this was true with respect to the role and expectations of women as it relates to her Womanist Theology. Flake says, "…I grew up believing that the Bible forbade women to wear pants, to enter the church with her head uncovered, even to play cards."[84] For Flake, her God experience came from within her cultural context. She believed whatever her culture taught her concerning the role of women in the church. Furthermore, she did not question what the scripture said concerning the role of women either nor did she even try to find out any other possibilities that the text may have had a different meaning.[85]

People have a mistaken belief that a community cannot maintain unless there is some tradition. However, there are some individuals who wish to believe differently that the church should in some way break away from how it does ministry work. In a nation where immigration has taken on a rise in population, the demographics of immigration are challenging the need for change in the way the traditional church promotes, preaches, and teaches Christianity. No longer are churches having a majority of a white or Black population of congregants as its context, but many churches are starting to become ethnically diverse, politically indiscriminate, and economically harmonious and coexisting as having each term of the variable the same degree of constancy of spiritual

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[84]Elaine M. Flake, *God In Her Midst: Preaching to Wounded Women* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press Publishers, 2007), 43.

[85]Ibid., 59.

mind, faith and loving God. The Roman Catholic faith has become the preferred denomination for many Hispanics. However, some in Latin America and in the United States are of the protestant faith. Retta notated that in 1971 that 95 percent of Hispanics in the United States were Roman Catholics but further added that by mid-1990s the numbers rose to 44 percent as evangelical [protestants] compared to the 26 percent that were evangelical in 1988.[86] Based up the demographics in a Chicago's South side neighborhood, there is a need to integrate the churches. Jobe, says, "In 1940, Chicago was 92 percent white and 8 percent Black. In 1999, Chicago is 32 percent white, 37 percent Black, 5 percent Asian and 26 percent Hispanic. At least seven neighborhoods in Chicago are so integrated they have no dominant racial group."[87]

Such ethnocentrism, nationalism, and traditionalism raised many eyebrows in the church to challenge and have an opportunity to minister to a new multicultural society. For the sake of the Gospel, Henriques adds that, first, Christians must understand their own ethnocentrism and that secondly, Paul calls the readers to understand the foreigner's perspective of cultural expression in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, *The Message,* which says,

> Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, lose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized-whoever. I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ-but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn't just want to talk about it; I wanted to be ***in*** on it![88]

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[86]Retta, "The Hispanic Evangelical Agenda", 18.

[87]Jobe, "Rethinking the Church to Reach the City", sec. 1, 17.

[88]Pocok and Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church,* 43.

Intercultural integration is becoming the new idea nationalism of today. Individuals of their nations are now taking on a new phenomenon of a dual allegiance: one being to their own nation and then the other being to that as a citizen of God, which Henriques speaks about.[89] This intercultural integration is shown in how Paul deals with a dilemma regarding Onesimus, a runaway slave of Philemon, who was a wealthy businessman of Colossae. Paul urges in his letter to Philemon, for him to welcome Onesimus as he [Philemon] had welcomed Paul (Phlm 1:10, *NRSV*). The explanation of this story was to show the response how good membership in a community is given towards those who may be called illegal aliens. Traditionalism, not only, if it is accepted, can and has changed history. But, also traditionalism can and has changed those identities of who has gone against the grain to being more Christ-like in efforts to reach out to others who are or were once immigrants. Henriques closes chapter two saying, "Church leaders of today have a threefold role in multicultural ministry: They are to be *sustainers* of their cultural traditions that promote and help God's work, *breakers* of those traditions that hinder, and *blenders* of the traditions of the cultures represented in the church."[90]

As history is constantly ever revolving, for some churches, many of them drew upon biblical and historical Christianized traditions of hospitality that focused on receiving the stranger and extending one's resources to them that were developed during the early church. For example, people have always been travelers and in need of a place to rest. The hotel industry has been the traveler's domicile. The hotel industry dates as far back as the biblical era, which has provided individuals as their home away from home. The Nativity scene that covers the birth of Jesus becomes a familiar story to many people

[89]Ibid., 47.

[90]Ibid., 53.

who are acquainted with it. Over some 2000 years ago in the town of Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary found an inn, which is considered lodging for travelers, where Joseph and Mary decided to stay.

During those times, the Romans made much of their money by opening up their homes to those who were traveling. The idea stay for those travelers like Joseph and Mary was one whereby the inns were very poorly established and that is shown in the fact that Jesus, Joseph and Mary's child, was born in a manger. But, it was not until the 18th century that the hotel industry began to make some improvements in the way it provided services to its customers. In 1607, the first inn opened up in the United States, which was similar in nature to that of the ancient sketch with open rooms and designated eating places. It was not until 1792 that the City Hotel, the first ever public hotel in the United States, was built and in 1809 the Tremont Hotel in Boston was the first business designated hotel in the United States.

A lot has evolved in the hotel industry and since then the hotel industry has increased to an international enterprise. Many hotels have become more attractive and decent compared to the biblical context that marketed a shabby and unclean temporary dormitory. From hotels being built in trees to caves where rooms were made out of ice to hotels being featured in casinos to being tourist attractions, the hotel industry has become an epic achievement. The MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas has 2,276 private rooms[91] and it is one of the most frequents hotels-being that it is located in a casino, for instance. The hotel industry stood for and it still stands even today as a historical beacon of hospitality.

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[91]Hotel Room Sites, http://www.hotelroomssite.com/history-hotel-industry (accessed 29 Oct 2012).

As a way to distinguish which hotel gave the best hospitality, a comparison of the different hotels was established by using the star rating system. The star rating system gave the patron some type of idea of what to expect as it relates to providing a service, size, and amenities provided by each different hotel. The star rating system varies in each country. Although, attempts have been made to standardize it globally, the star rating will still give a traveler an idea of what to expect concerning that particular hotel. To distinguish which hotel has the best ratings, one-star exemplifies the lowest while five-star is the highest. One-star usually is two to four stories high, single proprietor ownership, clean but simple. Two-star are similar to one-star, but it is part of a larger chain, standard televisions, limited dining area, no bellhop or room service. Three-star hotels are known as first class hotels with elaborate furnishing, breakfast and dinner dining, major attractions and part of a larger chain. Four-star is the superior of the hotels, similar to three-star, but with well lit rooms, bellhop, room service, valet parking, pool fitness center, and dining. However, the five-star hotel is considered the deluxe, containing everything anyone could ever imagine, which ranges from large lobbies, round the clock room service, large rooms, pools, dining, entertainment, part of a large chain and some independent hotels have more intimate and personal services not rendered at other hotels.[92]

Many churches are trying to break away from some of the traditionalisms that illustrate a close-minded mentality of spiritual worshipping practices among its congregation because of the lack of five-star excellence that may be illustrated among their congregational context. For some churches, the five-star excellence may include

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[92]Ibid.

inclusion of people who are different than everyone else and respect that has negatively impacted social relations and welcome. Since the inception of the early church, the issue has engendered a considerable amount of debate on how to extend hospitality and who should receive hospitality. Moreover, many of these churches are now redefining the role of the church and ministry by becoming more hospitable; thus making the religious institution more suitable and conducive for service, worship, evangelism and outreach.

Stan Toler and Alan Nelson's book, *The Five Star Church: Serving God and His people with Excellence,* writes,

> More than 80 percent of churches in the United States have plateaued or are declining. All it takes is a visit to these churches to understand why. They do not cater to the perceived needs of the community and are not aware of the lack of excellence. The signage, facilities, publicity, written materials and overall friendliness, reveals an inadequate self-esteem.[93]

The church cannot afford to continue to operate as it did in the 1950s, 1970s or even 1990s. This is now the twenty-first century and the church has to learn to transition to a ministry of hospitality as five-star excellence as the world continues to develop. A great example of five-star excellence is the way the hotel industry provides a five-star experience today and as far as a five-star church, Toler suggests these pointers in order to reach excellence: set goals in order to by abide in Christ, utilize spiritual gifts, learn how to work well with others in ministry, develop a process to make ministry leaders into caretakers, healthy communication, facilitate safe idea sharing, being proactive, having accountability, managerial and administrative skills who tracks progress, planning, develop quality relationships, love, acceptance, and forgiveness.[94]

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[93]Stan Toler and Alan Nelson, *The Five Star Church: Serving God and His People With Excellence* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999), 127.

[94]Ibid., 704-759.

As the movement in history of ideas begins to change, post modernity brings out a radical reappraisal of a more modern-day theory about customary beliefs, identities, religions, etc. Post modernity began during the Enlightenment period. Thomas Oden, a Christian thinker, asserts "that the modern age lasted exactly 200 years-from the fall of the Bastille in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989."[95] Graham Johnston in his discussion of his book, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, he says other scholars like Rene Descartes, who is famous for his asserting, *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) believes that post modernity began earlier in 1641. "For Decartes represents the point in time philosophically where rationalism takes the supreme position in the area of epistemology, the study of knowing."[96] The Enlightenment era rose out of scientific conviction, human inclination and inevitable progress for better possibilities. For Johnston, people did not have to revert back to their superstitions or biblical truths because now people can rely on experiential research and scientific rationalism.[97]

People began to recognize a need for change and thus individuals began to take on a postmodern way of thinking. It values faith and an opened mind in order to embrace everyone's standpoints according to what the individual perceives to be the truth. Does this challenge the Bible's authority? Yes, it does. Johnston says, "At best, the postmodern outlook places the Bible on equal footing with other sacred books like the Koran, the Vedas, the Talmud, and even less-respected writings."[98] Postmodern has often been

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[95]Oden in Gene Edward Veith Jr. *Post-modern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 27.

[96]Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 241.

[97]Ibid.

[98]Ibid., 299.

referred to as a shift in old ideas. But subsequently, Os Guinness says, "Modernism as a set of ideas may well have collapsed and 'postmodern' may therefore be legitimate to describe the set of ideas that succeed it."[99] Another writer and theologian, David Cook says,

> Postmodernism moves beyond the 'modern,' scientifically based view of the world by blending a skepticism about technology, objectivity, absolutes and total explanations with a stress on image and appearance, personal interpretation, pleasure and the exploration of every spiritual and material perspective.[100]

In closing, what post modernity is making known as the world continues to evolve is stressing the fact that there is a need to move into a more idea culture where everyone can be treated equally without any reason of oppressing and maintaining control over one another. This is the stance of the writer that everyone should be embraced with great hospitality that welcomes all of humanity into a relationship with God. Johnston infers on the basis of post modernity saying,

> Now, as the world moves into a postmodern age, the people who once had no Voice-women, children, the homeless, and native peoples-all share an equal standing. Everyone (and not just those in charge) now has a right to be heard. Postmodernity rejects all worldviews because one way of understanding the world will inevitably leave out someone, leading to marginalization and oppression. Tolerance becomes the balancing point to keep power equally distributed. The people of the twenty-first century have been conned too many times.
> When someone claims to know the truth, postmodernity asks,
> 'What's your angle?'"[101]

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[99]Os Guinness and John Seel, *No God but God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1992), 27.

[100]David Cook, *Blind Alley Beliefs* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 9.

[101]Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 332.

Theological Foundation

What is important to understand as it relates to hospitality is that the magnitude of Jesus' teachings and miraculous healing were found to be too improbable for belief by his followers. Even today, many times when individuals read the Bible, there are some who still do not believe in what the Holy Scriptures have said. Some individuals think that the Bible is some fairy tale book, filled with fabricated lies, unorthodox teachings and miracles of the Messianic Christ. People have to engage into theological debates over treating one another with equality until the individual is blue in the face and still the individual does not believe. When Jesus went to the house of Levi and ate with the tax collectors and sinners, still the scribes and Pharisees did not believe. When Jesus heard of this, he simply told them, "Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I'm here inviting the sin-sick, not the spiritually-fit" (Mk 2:13-17, MSG).

As time has evolved, the church has become institutionalized and continues to lower its standards as it relates to who is deemed fit to become a part of a religious society. Hospitality has been forgotten about and has been pushed off to the side, which has left every man and woman defending for themselves when it comes down to obtaining salvation, developing a spiritual relationship, understanding Christianity and even coming to understanding oneself. Such marginalization has brought a major concern to those individuals who make up the Body of Christ simply because many individuals have battled with how the ecclesiology has recently changed over some 2013 years later concerning who should be welcomed and accepted into the church. Therefore, this hermeneutic of theology, at its best, will describe a model of variations of faith for those

individuals intended. It is the desire that this theological framework will glean the most befitting response for the said religious faith.

In his collection of sermons that were delivered at Basel Prison in Switzerland, Karl Barth's preaching moments in his book, *Deliverance to the Captives*, had reached many of those men and women who were considered to be off scouring and it allowed individuals to make careful dialogue with God concerning the basis for this belief. These sermons preached by Barth captures the participation of all walks of life, the elderly, incarcerated, poor, and the sick, the opportunity for deliverance. His message and prayer invited God's presence to the person's deliverance. As remnant in the modern era of 1886-1968, Barth demonstrated hospitality in such a way that he made those who were considered to be off scouring because of their indifference to feel like these individuals were a part of a family who cares. Barth often refers to them as "My dear brothers and sisters," or as "my dear friends."[102]

Barth develops a personal relationship with individuals whom he may have known as being either physically incarcerated well as those being mentally incarcerated. What Barth exhibits in his behavior and theological perspective suggests that he has no respecter of persons and that he values all of humanity. Not one time did Barth past judgment on them but he makes the connection with the outcast and makes them a part of who he is. This illustration that Barth presents concerning hospitality is one that invites all persons to harmonious fellowship. Barth's theological vocation attempts to demoralize those individuals who forbid a hospitable environment as the welcoming hand into the

[102]Karl Barth, *Deliverance to the Captives* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 94.

beloved community. Not only is this meaningful in order to evolve a harmonious fellowship, but it also becomes meaningful Christologically whereby Christ is manifested in every aspect of humanity. Through reinforcing Christ as the Divine, human beings will come to know that Christ as God is incarnated in every important human value and it is through this consideration of thought that this theological underpinning includes being hospitable, welcoming and accepting of one another. John Marsh, Principal of Mansfield College in Oxford, England, states:

> If I were asked to put into one sentence the basic principle that underlies all Barth's theology I think I would say that it is directed, all the way through, to but one end- to leave completely undistorted and uncompromised the great, wonderful and mysterious fact that God has spoken to us in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.[103]

Theologically, what this is saying to the Christian believer is that Barth's theology includes God and Christ in the Christian beliefs and practices of the believer's faith. Barth's theology aims to establish Christian values as guidelines for an ever-changing world that may have lost its deep love for hospitality. If an individual has confessed and accepted God as the supreme Deity, and Christ as the Son of God, then it is safe to conclude that the individual cannot operate fully without the help of either God or Christ in their life. Barth says, "God does not exist without humanity, because God has decided in Jesus Christ not to be God without us. Likewise, humanity does not exist without God, because Jesus Christ has decided in our place and for our sakes not to be human without God."[104] It is also safe to assert that God, Christ, nor humanity can exist without the other because all rely on the interaction of each other for their true existence.

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[103]Ibid., 9.

[104]George Hunsinger, *How To Read Karl Barth* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 154.

As Barth's theology begins to unfold, the question raised is how does an individual respond to people who have been experiencing oppression by inhospitable measures? B. Allen Quigley and Gary W. Kuhne titled *Creating Practical Knowledge Through Action Research: Posing Problems, Solving Problems and Improving Daily Practice* offers suggestive ways of teachings and learning in hopes that those who are engaged in the educational process will take ownership over the knowledge products on which the individuals piece together their progressive achievements[105] and in this case the scriptures make it plain and simple in its teachings-to this extent, the commonality of the interaction between God, Christ and humanity requires love. What is being displayed in some churches is how individuals are being taught to oppress some people and only love and embrace individuals in some instances based upon their personal beliefs and or religious doctrines and if so, then is this the image that the church wants to portray as its ministry's developmental training of its members, a religious oppression?

Barth is noted for his four motifs as he explains the personal encounter that takes place as God, Christ and humanity develops an interaction or relationship together. One motif that Barth accentuates is on actualism. What Barth is maintaining as his stance is on the fact that God is constantly doing an illustrious act of deed. Mostly that act of deed is exhibited through God's love for all of humanity. John 3:16 argues the love of God to the fullest extent by giving Christ as a ransom so that all of humanity may live eternally. Not only does God's love exist in humanity, but also through the Son and the Holy Spirit. Here God demonstrates that an individual has to love in order to be loved.

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[105]B. Allen Quigley and Gary W. Kuhne, editors, *Creative Practical Knowledge Through Action Research: Posing Problems, Solving Problems and Improving Daily Practice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997).

Secondly, Barth argues his motif of particularism, which he devotes a specific interest emphasizing the gift of Christ's grace given to humanity. Here Barth makes the argument that the Son of God demonstrates the notion of love as an act only in itself through the giving of grace. Yong even in his book continues to speak about how the Second Adam (Christ) came so that humanity may be saved from the world of corruption as 2 Peter 1:4b[106] and this in itself is an act of love on Jesus Christ part as he tries to develop a relationship with humanity. So, even if humanity does not want to develop a relationship with God and or Christ, God and Christ is always chasing after humanity as a sign of God's love for humanity.

Objectivism is the third motif that Barth places his claim on and that he makes it known that God expressed God's self as a manifestation through the Son of God. Barth stands firmly on his belief that God is seen through the life of Christ Jesus and his ministry. As for Barth is concerned, there is a unity of fellowship established between the Creator [God] and the Son [Jesus]. God welcomes Christ and imparts the Spirit of God within Christ as a token of love. As for pneumatology, there is a joining of the Godheads [God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit] who are gladly entering into one another's presence as a love song. The image presented among the Trinity illustrates that their hospitality toward each individual Godhead is a model for humanity to follow as a constant reminder that humanity is able to co-exist together even amidst their individualistic differences. The *Imago Dei* is best described in this light as humanity being exemplified through the objectivism of the Creator incarnated in Christ.

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[106]Yong, *Hospitality and the Other,* 43.

He emphatically affirms and maintains that the Creator God is willing to develop a personal connection or relationship with those individuals who want to establish an opportunity for such a kinship. This Barth coins as his last motif that is centered on personalism, which he expounds on the intimacy between God, Christ, and humanity. It is an I-Thou relationship in its respect for the profundity of intimacy.[107] It is an exercise of a hospitable act that is carried out by God with human beings and the individuals in return respond to such hospitable treatment. This response shows how God accepts and welcomes all persons into a relationship with the Creator God.

Being able to develop a relationship with God allows the individual who seeks the personal encounter with God to become incorporated or united as a part of the family of God. When referring to individuals being included in the family of God, for Barth, that means all persons can in fact come into communion or koinonia (κοινωνία) with the Creator; no one is exempt from gaining access to such a spiritual connection with the Holy One. This is the message that Barth was trying to proclaim to those in the Basel prison that even those who are incarcerated, both males and females, can be included and cannot escape such an offer. God makes available a bond that cannot be refused.

Barth prefers that all individuals, whether male or female, would strive to become more like Christ and it is Barth's hope that all individuals will exhibit and practice *imitation Christi,* which means to imitate Christ. Imitating Christ can be very difficult at times, however, it is the best preferred method to use in any given situation. If given a situation whereby an individual may feel compelled to act then the question raised in the mind of the individual should be—"What would Jesus do?" Christians should take on the

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[107]Hunsinger, *How To Read Karl Barth,* 41.

mindset of Christ and follow in the same spirit in which Christ gave as a model for all, especially as it relates to how people should treat one another. Jesus came to help those individuals who were oppressed, marginalized, discriminated against, ostracized, etc. Jesus raised Christian standards by being opened-minded and welcoming to those who society banished and put in exile. For example, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, writes from a pastoral approach on prophetic preaching how Emilie Townes, a womanist theologian, went on to name in one of her sermons very specific ways the pain that GLBT (gay, Lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered) persons suffer, while inviting the community to stand with them in their suffering.[108] For Tisdale, what has been helpful in imitating a Christ-like behavior is through the theocracy of Walter Brueggemann, who uses a sermon strategy by taking a stand with the congregation rather than opposing the congregation.

> Walter Brueggemann draws what has proven for me a very helpful and insightful analogy between preaching and family systems theory. He says that in most church situations of biblical interpretation three voices are operative: that of the biblical text, that of the pastor, and that of the congregation. Yet all too often pastors team up with texts to 'triangle' against their congregations in preaching, leaving the congregation 'a hostile, resistant outsider.' How much better, contends Brueggemann, if the pastor stands with the congregation against the text, letting the radical Word of God offend both![109]

Tisdale continues to point out there are ways in which the congregation can use their current mission as a prophetic witness in order to allow the preaching moment to bridge the gap between the congregational history and prophetic witnessing. He continues to expound on the fact that the parishioners are already engaged in some daily activity of

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[108]Leonora Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 47.

[109]Walter Brueggemann, "The Preacher, the Text and the People," *Theology Today* 47 (October 1990): 237-47. Brueggemann adopts the concept of "triangling" from family therapists Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York, NY: J. Aranson, 1978); and Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process Church and Synagogue* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1985). See also my discussion in Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 50-51.

providing a service that eases the pain and suffering of those in and around the neighborhood. He put emphasis on the church and how the pastor and church formed an alliance with those immigrants who came into the United States in order to address systemic issues concerning the immigration reformation.[110] What the officialdom of a religious body and laypeople are called to do goes beyond the four walls of the church and out into a grieving community who wants to know how to believe and develop a relationship with the God whom the church knows as the Supreme Deity who can free them from every oppressive struggle for civil rights, freedom, justice, success and survival. Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank quotes Leonard Sweet by reminding the church to live outside of the walls of the church in order to find out what God is sending their way by saying "Nudgers make the familiar strange. Nudgers overcome the deadening effects of the overfamiliar by reframing familiar things in unfamiliar ways."[111] In other words, Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank suggests that "Sweet calls the church to move from what we knew in the past to be right and good to what is new and good for the present and future."[112]

Making all individuals feel welcomed extends even in the economic crisis of a nation whereby individuals are made to be free from financial depression in order to improve family income since some families are living either below or at the poverty line. Becoming hospitable in social activism prompts the youth to engage in opportunities were the youth can be a part in setting historical markers for generations to come in doing

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[110]Leonora Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 52.

[111]Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010).

[112]Rasmus and Escobedo-Frank, *Jesus Insurgency,* 28.

charity work and promoting human welfare as young philanthropist. Finding ways to lower the risk of HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes, STDs and other deadly diseases that are plaguing the community is a working way to forge unity in finding a cure to combat such sicknesses. Having food pantries, clothing drive, homeless shelters is an extension of providing social services into church ministry that invests in those individuals who are in need. Allowing individuals to engage in mission work equips them to become advocates in fulfilling the will of Christ as mandated in Matthew 28:18-19, as it relates to the Great Commission. Being able to gladly give hospitality to others identifies four motific themes that lead to advancing the kingdom of God: 1) oneness of humankind; 2) covenant relationship; 3) servanthood and discipleship; and 4) evangelization and salvation.

While Barth recognized the need to have actualism, particualrism, objectivism, and personalism, James Cone embraces the need of Black theology. For Cone, Black theology is a way to express the need for Black power. In the 1960s, Black theologians were determined to embrace their Black identities and as a result the *Black Power* experience began to form throughout America in order to free the enslaved Black people who were oppressed by their White constituents. Those who were mainly voicing the Black theology were Black poor individuals. The stance that Cone had referenced the fact that Christ died for all of humanity. However, Cone did also maintain the fact that he was concerned about the wellbeing of the Black race that was being subjected to racial overtones by a white Western culture.

These negative connotations and overtones presented by whites against Blacks illustrate an inhospitable treatment that left Black people feeling alone and abandoned by a God who seemed as if Black people were a menace to society and should be eradicated

from the planet. Such oppressive behavior towards Black people created a notion that white people were superior to Black people and it gave the notion that God did not love Black people while simultaneously left some Black people questioning the integrity of God. Some questions raised were:

> What does it mean to be Black in a world that defines Whites as human and Blacks as less than human? Is Blackness an unfortunate accident of birth that African Americans should be ashamed of? Or is Blackness a gift of creation to be affirmed with joy and thankfulness? What does it mean to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus, in a world that portrays Jesus as a White man and Christianity as a European religion?[113]

Cone's theological concept concerning Black Power would refute the fact that Blacks are not inferior or less human and that Blackness is not an unfortunate mishap. But, rather that Black theology and Black Power represented a since of hope and pride, which embraces the very essences of who Black people are. Although, there are many individuals who have perceived Cone's theology as unorthodox teachings, but for Cone it was hope, freedom, and Blackness. This was a sense of pride that allowed the Black scholars and theologians to develop a relationship with God while in the midst of their oppressiveness. Cone's theology in Chapter Seven of *Black Theology: A Documentary History* as stating that it "…has been and continues to be primarily a theology of protest" says James Harris.[114] Black theology is liberation and change for Blacks and poor people says Harris after examining Cone's thesis. It also proclaims Christ as the liberator and declares Black Power.[115] Although Cone's theology is quite different from Barth's

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[113]James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 1.

[114]James H. Cone & Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), vol. 2, 92. This quotation in Chapter 7 entitled "Black Church and Black Theology: Theory and Practice" written by James H. Harris is referenced to Jones, *The Color of God*, 6.

[115]Ibid., 89.

theology, nevertheless, both of their theology invites individuals to overcome their oppressors by way of hospitable interactions; welcoming, accepting and embracing individuals to be expressive as the way God created them to be and to develop a relationship with God for the sake of establishing brotherly and sisterly love with neighbors.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Planting a five star congregation for the least of these is greatly needed if the Christian community plans to embrace a diverse community of Christian believers. Therefore the data collected in this project will explain why the church has lost its connection in being a hospitable place of worship for all of humanity. It will show what the response of the people and the pulpit to this matter and how to retain the five star excellence approach in extending hospitality to everyone in the congregation.

It is said that learning is the best teacher. Sometimes the best way for individuals to learn is to make reflections based upon their experiences and practices. When an individual applies self-direction into their application, then Patricia Cranton considers this to be called a transformation. She writes, "Sometimes transformation is stimulated through the direction of another person but is in the end a self-directed process."[1] Different concepts can be developed out of this process. Self-directed learning can be best described defined M. S. Knowles as quoted by Cranton as "being a process in which learners 'take the initiative, with or without the help of others' (1975, 18) in diagnosing

[1]Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996), 50-51.

their needs, setting objectives, selecting resources, choosing learning strategies and evaluating their progress."[2]

Her book, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning*, is increasingly didactical and dialogical. Cranton conveys instructions that will prepare educators and students to have total control and direction over their learning experiences. Based upon reflection from the recent class intensive, this is one of the main emphases that were expressed by the United Theological Seminary faculty concerning the student's projects while in the Doctor of Ministry program. The faculty instructors suggested to its students that this is what makes the students' projects phenomenal is because the projects are self-directed by the students who regulate the study of their final doctoral project.

So with that being said, to gain a better understanding of For the Least of These; Planting a Five Star Congregation, focus group sessions were conducted at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc., to help the researcher and the participants diagnosing their needs, setting objectives, selecting resources, choosing learning strategies and evaluating their progress. These focus group sessions covered several areas: lectures, preaching and interviews. As a result of these focus group sessions, research was collected, defined and defended in regards to planting a five star congregation for the least of these. A qualitative research method was used to measure the effectiveness of the sessions.

Out of three commonly used methods for research, the qualitative method was used in this project. John Creswell explains this preferred method in his book and how it seeks to discover an understanding of the social and human problems from multiple perspectives, using the natural setting of the participants, which allows the researcher to

[2]Ibid., 53.

make interpretations about the data collected and using one or more strategies of inquiry as a guide for the procedures in the qualitative study.[3] To triangulate this data; a qualitative pretest and posttest questionnaire was administered; sermon evaluations and exit interviews were administered to the participants. This approach offered a versed but valid articulation of this project. From the final findings, participants will understand the urgency to plant a five star congregation for the least of these.

There are several variables attributing to the project's analytical results. The first phase consisted of pretest questionnaires. The second phase consisted of lectures that underscored theoretical applications. The third phase consisted of sermon listening sessions that highlighted this form of preaching. The fourth phase consisted of posttest questionnaires. These steps were instrumental in carrying out the methodology principle for this particular project.

Survey Questionnaires

A pretest questionnaire was administered in the first phase of this project. The questionnaire was used and distributed to focus group participants to measure their attitude of the treatment of inhospitality in the church and how the church has lost its connection to all of humanity because of its inhospitable acts. The pretest questionnaire will consist of several questions that will ask the participants to rate each answer on a Likert Scale. The Likert Scale model of research was used because of its credibility and consistency in measuring the data properly. In addition, the Likert Model permitted the participants to specify their level of agreement or disagreement on a symmetric scale for

[3]John W. Creswell, *Research Design* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 181-183.

a cycle of statements. Because of this model preferred, participants were able to affirm their position by responding: strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree or disagree.

There were at least thirteen questions presented on the pretest survey using the Likert Scale. The questions focused on the participants knowledge and understanding of hospitality. The main purpose of this survey was to distinguish the participant's perception of hospitable and inhospitable acts in the church. This questionnaire was administered during the month of March 2013. In lieu of Bible study, thirty-one parishioners participated in the study. Tests and sessions were administered every Sunday at 11:00 A.M. and on Wednesdays at 6:45 P.M. for eight weeks. At the end of the period, thirty-one people completed the study.

The posttest survey was administered to the same focus group. The posttest survey consisted of the same questions as the pretest survey questionnaire. The information gathered from both of these surveys will be compared to one another to gauge the various findings. In light of this thought, if the posttest questions had changed from the pretest question the survey would be rendered inconsistent. Thus, utilizing the same questions eradicated the possibility of skewed data. The results of the study will illustrate the differences in the participant's perceptions of hospitable or inhospitable acts affecting the participant's relationship in and out of the church. The participants will respond to the survey based on their experiences and beliefs, which may hinder or benefit this study.

Focus Group

The second phase consisted of an eight-week focus group session, which was used to reveal the underlining attitudes, experiences and belief systems of participants. During the focus group session there were lectures series on the welcoming and acceptance of all of humanity, followed by a question and answer session. The lecture notes were a part of theoretical foundations section of the dissertation. The lecture topics included: Hospitality and the Treatment of Strangers, God's Unity with Humanity, Early Christianity and Hospitality and Developing Relationships with Individuals.

During the lecture on *Hospitality and the Treatment of Strangers*, Genesis 18:1-15 and *God's Unity with Humanity*, John 15:12-13 were examined and divided into sections on. During the *Hospitality and the Treatment of Strangers* Lecture, *Hospitality has no Boundaries, Hospitality is Receiving and Welcoming, Hospitality is Rewarding* (taken from Genesis 18:1-15) were discussed. During the *God's Unity with Humanity* Lecture, *Love, Community, and Inclusion* (taken from John 15:12-13) were discussed. During the lecture on *Early Christianity and Hospitality* the issues of *The Spread of Christianity, How Jesus exhibited Hospitality, To Whom Hospitality is given, and Rating Five-Star Excellence* were explored. During the *Developing Relationships with Individuals* Lecture, *Who Should Be Welcomed and Accepted, Imitating Christ and Not Inferior or Less Human* were discussed.

Group Assessment

The third phase consisted of a group assessment, which included an evaluation and a listening process so participants could understand the planting of a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these. The central focus of study was to allow

participants to have a profound understanding of welcoming and acceptance of all persons and social justice ministry. The sermon listening process was a practical and holistic approach to allowing participants engaged in the study to have a more complete understanding about the hospitality excellence. The focus group had the opportunity to listen to the researcher's messages as the current pastor of the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis Inc.'s in order to determine whether the members were made to feel welcomed.

Exit Interviews

The exit interview was the fourth phase of this project. Each question was designed to reflect the overall project as well as the projects affects. The exit interview questions were tailored only for the researcher's context associates. These questions were given to the context associates in hope that the project findings would yield a proper conclusion. Thus these questions allowed the context associates a final opportunity to articulate their comprehension of the project.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

There has been a need to revamp the way the ecclesial body treats its parishioners, visitors and those individuals who are considered to be the outcast outside the church walls. Some churches and its leaders have turned a deaf ear to the cries of those individuals who have been oppressed, ostracized, marginalized, and disenfranchised by the realities that may seem to exist within the community. These realities that are present within the community reflect that there are individuals from all walks of life who attend church or wants to develop some type of relationship with God have been mistreated for many unknown various reasons ranging from gender, sexual preferences, socio-economic backgrounds, race, and etc. However, this theological underpinning to this thesis have illustrated that there is a new movement that is sweeping the minds of many Christians today who wants to challenge the church in its doctrine and want to hold the church to be true to the teachings of Christ by loving, accepting and welcoming all individuals into the kingdom of God. It is with this understanding that this project was discovered in hopes to developing a place of worship that is hospitable to all people, regardless of the differences, so that individuals may reconnect with God.

In order to test the hypothesis for this particular project, the researcher conducted lectures, preached sermons, and conducted focus group sessions with exit interviews. Through these processes, the researcher was able to measure the efficiency of this data,

which was based upon the participant's response. This project was ultimately comprised of several components to assist in gathering this research data. The first portion gathered data that consisted of a pretest survey which measured the viewpoints of the participants as it relates to the participant's understanding of the project's intentions and the importance of the teaching and preaching influence from the pulpit to the pew. Secondly, there was a lecture series that reflected the researcher's central experimentation study that drew special interest on the theoretical foundations section of this particular project. Thirdly, there was a sermon series presented to the participants. Fourthly, the implementation of exit interview was given to the context associates. Finally, there was a posttest survey questionnaire administered.

On March 3, 2013, the researcher along with the context associates and thirty-one participants had discussed their willingness to be a part and participate in this research study project. After the researcher had passed out the solicitation letters, the researcher opened up with prayer and then the participants was given an in-depth overview of what the project will address. Copies of the outline covering the syllabus were distributed. The researcher discussed the overall intent and purpose of the project in hopes of allowing the participants to gain an understanding of the project's main goal and achievement. The researcher also gave an explanation of the United Theological Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program and its intent to develop church leaders for implementing models for the church.

The researcher continued to instill the ultimate reasoning for this particular project in the minds of the participants. A brief discussion of the researcher's spiritual autobiography was given to let the participants know the researcher and then the synergy

was given in order that the participants might understand the combining action of the ministry context and the researcher. The researcher mentioned the course objectives and opened the floor for any questions at which time there were none. Then the researcher expounded on the data that will be collected and implemented into this project for the purpose of compiling the findings for the discussion of this project.

Once the orientation of this project was completed, the context associates assisted the researcher in this project by handing out the pretest survey for the participants to complete in order to gain an understanding of their views concerning the certain issues and then to gain a level of understanding of the participant's expectation of the church and its stance on hospitality as it relates to persons being accepted and welcome in the church. The entire analysis is based on surveys filled out by the participants based on their perception. There is really no way to be sure if the participants are answering the survey truthfully. Therefore, the data reliability could be determined through the test-retest method in order to get the same results from the respondents. The results of the study will illustrate the differences in the participants' perceptions of both the pretest and posttest as it relates to their understanding of the questionnaire. The participants will respond to the survey based on their experiences and beliefs, which may hinder or benefit this study. The questionnaire will be soliciting answers that range from how the participants addressed either their experienced of church inhospitality to their belief of how the church should treat all persons within its congregation and communities.

The participants were given a chance to share some personal experiences of church hospitality or church inhospitality and then the participants had to make a self-assessment regarding some theological concerns on determining the intention of the

preaching moment. The discussion continued to shed light on the fact that the preachment should address the issues of the parishioners and find ways to help the parishioners find positive results and overcome. In light of the problem(s) that is addressed in this project, the participants should gather from the preachment that there is a need for the church to challenge the way people are being mistreated in the church and to change that negative perception by planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these. A working definition of what it means to be hospitable, welcoming, accepting, and love to all persons will be given to help the participants gain a better understanding as the preachment is proclaimed. A working definition of those individuals who are considered to be different will be given to the participants to gain a working knowledge of what it means to be treated unfairly. The researcher articulated to the participants how the Bible has been misinterpreted and used to oppress and marginalize those who have been coined as different. The preaching moment points out social concerns and injustices of how those individuals who were coined as different have been mistreated within the church and community. The participants were given the questionnaire and were asked to respond to the best of their ability in an effort to eliminate any potential bias results.

In the concluding phase, the participants were asked to participant in a demographics survey. The researcher was able to gather insight concerning the participant's background. There were seven questions on demographic survey that dealt identified the participant's age, marital status, gender, membership standing, academic background, economic and political status. The participants were urged to answer each question with great honesty and integrity. Although the survey was private it was also advised that it will be used in the final project with the collected data which may become

public record. What made the survey private was due to the participants not identifying themselves by using their names.

There were thirty-one participants who participated in the project study. These participants were members who either had officially joined the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. or who were attending the church but has not made their membership official as of yet. Participants between the ages of thrifty-five to forty-nine represented 32 percent, 39 percent of the participants were between the ages of nineteen to thirty-four, 23 percent of the participants were between the ages of fifty to sixty-four, and 3 percent were either sixty-five plus or between the ages of twelve to eighteen. Of the participants who participated in the project, 71 percent were single, 13 percent of the participants were married, and 16 percent of the participants were divorced. Of the participants, 52 percent were males while 48 percent of the participants were females. Of those who participated, 39 percent had been members six months or more, 39 percent of the participants were not members yet or visitors, 6 percent of the participants were members for five months, 7 percent of the participants were members for four months, while 3 percent of the participants were members for either one month, two months, or three months. Educationally, 39 percent of the participants attended college, 29 percent of the participants graduated college, 16 percent of the participants were in graduate school, 13 percent of the participants graduated high school while only 3 percent completed grade school. Based on income, 29 percent made between twenty-thousand and one dollars to thirty thousand dollars; 26 percent of the participants made either between zero dollars to twenty thousand dollars or thirty thousand and one dollars to fifty thousand dollars; 16 percent of the participants made between fifty thousand and one dollars to one

hundred thousand dollars while 3 percent of the participants reported making one thousand dollars plus as gross income. Politically, 94 percent of the participants were Democrats while 3 percent of the participants were either Republican or Independent.

Focus Group Sessions

The second phase consisted of an eight-week focus group session, which was used to reveal the underlining attitudes, experiences and belief systems of participants. During the focus group session there were lectures series on the welcoming and acceptance of all of humanity, followed by a question and answer session. The lecture notes were a part of theoretical foundations section of the dissertation. The lecture topics included: Hospitality and the Treatment of Strangers, God's Unity with Humanity, Early Christianity and Hospitality and Developing Relationships with Individuals.

During the lecture on *Hospitality and the Treatment of Strangers*, Genesis 18:1-15 and *God's Unity with Humanity*, John 15:12-13 were examined and divided into sections on. During the *Hospitality and the Treatment of Strangers* Lecture, *Hospitality has no Boundaries, Hospitality is Receiving and Welcoming, Hospitality is Rewarding* (taken from Genesis 18:1-15) were discussed. During the *God's Unity with Humanity* Lecture, *Love, Community, and Inclusion* (taken from John 15:12-13) were discussed. During the lecture on *Early Christianity and Hospitality* the issues of *The Spread of Christianity, How Jesus exhibited Hospitality, To Whom Hospitality is given, and Rating Five-Star Excellence* were explored. During the *Developing Relationships with Individuals* Lecture, *Who Should Be Welcomed and Accepted, Imitating Christ and Not Inferior or Less Human* were discussed.

Sermons Series

The third portion of the phase was a reflection of sermons that emphasized a form of preaching towards a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these. The intention of the sermon series was to proffer a homiletic that captured some textual hermeneutics. The sermons contained rhetoric that centered on social justice issues, personal struggles and communal concerns. These sermons provided insight and clarity in overcoming oppressive realities. Expository preaching was used to approach the preparation and delivery of each sermon.

The intention of the sermon series was to empower the congregation through biblical principles to extend hospitality all people; even to those considered to be the least of these. There were four sermons preached that centered on this thematic type preachment. *A Need for Building Community*; Romans 12:9-13, *An Aftermath of the Resurrection*; 1 Peter 3:13-18, *A Troubled Manual for Christians*; Galatians 5:13-15 and *A False Religion that's Worthless*; Jeremiah 7:1-11. The series of homilies that was offered raises the self-consciousness of oneself as it relates to the inhospitality that has been presented in the church and it motivates a change in their oppressive state.

To measure the effectiveness of the sermons, seven leaders of the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. completed a sermon questionnaire form. The church leaders were asked to answer the following questions: members clearly understand the call for loving all of God's people; members know the difference between being inclusive and exclusive; members understand their role and responsibility to the local community; members are ready to revive the church's call to welcoming, accepting and loving all people; members cense a call to speak truth to oppressive realities of others; a prophetic

preaching hermeneutic is needed to liberate an oppressed individual; the church should have a social consciousness.

Exit Interviews

The exit interview was implemented in Phase IV and it was given to the context associates. The qualitative research method that the researcher used provided an analysis of the attributive response collected in the data. The qualitative research method was to also provide a clear working knowledge to the context associates of this project's approach. During the implementation of this project, it was expected from the context associates to remain bias and non-prejudicial. There were ten questions presented in this project that addressed some general affects of this project. It was hoped that these questions given to the context associates would aid in a proper response. The final outcome given will reflect the context associate's response to the questions. Listed below are the questions that were asked of the context associates:

1. Do you feel the Bible study lectures influenced the participants to become a more welcoming church?
2. Do you believe as a result of the study members understood the projects purpose?
3. Do you think the congregation realized their role to their members and responsibility to their local community?
4. Do you feel the congregation understands that prophetic preaching is a call to action, which stirs up change in an individual life?
5. Do you believe the congregation understands the need to prompt transformation as it relates to how the church treats one another;
6. Do you think the congregation understands that doing outreach ministry advances the prophetic agenda?

7. Do you feel our congregation understands that planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these causes us to move from apathy to action?

8. Do you believe our congregation understands that the church is a place of empowerment and transformation?

9. Do you think the pulpit of the Cathedral of Praise has revived her prophetic voice during the preaching moment?

10. Do you feel the congregation is ready to demonstrate the essence of planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these, which is shown through transformative ministry?

The Results of the Pretest and Posttest Survey

Thirty-one participants participated in the conclusion of the posttest questionnaire. Some of the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc.'s membership body had conflicting schedules and were not able to participate in the implementation of this project. However, thirty-one individuals were able to participate and as a result these responses to the survey reflected the thirty-one participants' answers to the questionnaire. The posttest results were compared to the pretest results, which illustrated some type of intensity or reduction towards improving the comprehension of the participants' knowledge of this project.

Q1. I have experienced some type of church hurt or brokenness at some point in my life.

PRE: 39 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 39 percent agree; 19 disagreed; 3 percent strongly disagreed

POST: 52 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 26 percent agreed; 16 percent disagreed; 6 percent strongly disagreed

Q2. I have seen and heard other individuals share their personal experience of not being accepted during their church experience.

PRE: 61 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 36 percent agreed; 3 percent Disagreed

POST: 74 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 23 percent agreed;
3 percent disagreed

Q3. I believe the church should be welcoming, accepting, and loving of all People regardless of other individual's personal and religious stances on race, gender, socieo-statues, sexuality, religious inequalities, etc.

PRE: 94 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 6 percent agreed

POST: 97 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 3 percent agreed

Q 4. No one should be discriminated against as it relates to participating in the life, growth and witness of the church.

PRE: 87 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 13 percent agreed

POST: 97 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 3 percent agreed

Q5. The church has become a revolving door for the community that it serves due to individuals leaving the church because of past church hurt experiences.

PRE: 65 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 32 percent agreed; 3 percent Disagreed

POST: 59 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 41 percent agreed

Q6. The church should be more of a reflection of the diverse neighborhood in which it serves.

PRE: 74 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 23 percent agreed; 3 percent disagreed

POST: 81 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 19 percent agreed

Q7. The church, including the pastor, staff, leaders, and members, should display friendliness and hospitality to all persons that attend it's services.

PRE: 87 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 10 percent agreed; 3 percent disagreed

POST: 94 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 6 percent agreed

Q8. The pulpit should not be the place to articulate your personal biases against certain genres of people.

PRE: 71 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 23 percent agreed; 6 percent Disagreed.

POST: 77 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 23 percent agreed

Q9. Should the church be a place where you would invite your families, friends, and neighbors to attend?

PRE: 87 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 10 percent agree; 3 percent strongly disagreed

POST: 87 percent of the respondents; 10 percent agree; 3 percent disagreed

Q10. I often times experience social oppression in the community and spiritual oppression in the church.

PRE: 26 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 48 percent agreed; 23 percent disagreed; 3 percent strongly disagreed.

POST: 29 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 39 percent agreed; 16 percent disagreed; 16 percent strongly disagreed.

Q11. The church should not be a place where a person should experience negativity and mistreatment.

PRE: 84 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 13 agreed; 3 percent strongly Disagreed

POST: 87 percent of the respondents strongly agreed; 10 percent agreed; 3 percent disagreed.

Q12. There should be some teaching and preaching that educates people on cultural diversity and cultural awareness.

PRE: 81 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 19 percent agreed

POST: 90 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 10 percent agreed

Q13. The church should signify excellence as a five-star service rating and not anything less.

PRE: 74 percent of the respondents strongly agreed while 26 percent agreed

POST: 94 percent strongly agreed while 6 percent agreed

As noted in the recorded data, the researcher discovered that there were some distinguishing results from the respondents. Based upon the results from the respondents, it was clear that the participants articulated that there was a need for planting a five-star welcoming congregation for the least of these. Although the posttest did have favorable results, the researcher expected the results of the posttest to be much higher as seen in questions 5, 8 and 10. Also in question 8, the researcher expected the posttest results in the strongly agree category to be much higher than what was rendered. It was the researcher's hypothesis that the posttest would yield results that would display an extremely greater percentage. However, once the questions were analyzed, the researcher understood why the results of those questions in the area of strongly agree were as low. Question *Five* addressed the respondents' understanding of the church being a revolving door for the community that it serves due to individual's leaving the church because of past church hurt experiences.

Question *Five* had a low response in the area of the posttest strongly agree category simply because in the focus group discussion the participants articulated that since their membership at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc., there has not been a revolving door syndrome effect for them as compared to some of their previous experiences at other churches. Question *Eight* addressed the respondents' understanding of the pulpit not being a place for the preacher/pastor to articulate personal biases against certain genres of people.

Question *Eight* had a low response in the area of the posttest strongly agree category. During the focus group discussion it was articulated that question *Eight* could have been viewed in several contexts, which in this since question *Eight* was resulted in a positive response from the respondents who strongly agreed that the pulpit is not meant to preach or teach negative bias opinions.

Question *Ten* addressed the respondents' understanding of experiencing social oppression in the community and spiritual oppression in the church. Question *Ten* had a low response in the area of both the pretest and posttest strongly agree category. Being that the project's implementation was in the South and many of the participants were from the Memphis area where negative racial overtones and discrimination is prevalent due to the history of segregation, slavery, women in ministry and same gender loving viewpoints of the South are, the researcher expected a more larger percentage of respondents to indicate their strong agreement of their experience of social and spiritual oppression as well as discussed during the focus group session. However, the data illustrated a different reaction.

The basis of this project points out in its conclusion from the gathering data that the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. understands the need to plant a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these. When making comparisons of both the pretest and posttest evaluations the overall data collected resulted in a significant increase in the posttest percentages that ultimately proved the researcher's hypothesis. By reviewing the pretest and posttest questionnaire, ninety percent of the posttest respondents in question *Twelve* strongly agrees that there should be some teaching and preaching that educates people on diversity and cultural awareness; ninety-four percent of

the posttest respondents in question *Thirteen* strongly agrees that the church should signify excellence as a five-star rating and moreover, ninety-seven percent of the posttest respondents in question *Three* believe the church should be welcoming, accepting and loving of all people regardless of other individual's personal and religious stances on race, gender, soci-statues, sexuality, religious inequalities, etc.

The fundamental proposition of this project maintains that the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. understood the importance of planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these. When comparing both the pretest to the posttest surveys, the researcher noticed that the participants in this project remained consistent throughout and the posttest revealed that there was a yearning for the participants to make a difference in the church through their understanding of the overall theme of this particular project's thesis.

A qualitative study was used, whereas, the pretest and posttest questionnaire, looked at the statistical correlation between the respondents pre-knowledge and post-knowledge of the project's dissertation. The data from both the pretest and posttest illustrates a compelling analysis that resulted in a good relationship with the respondent's understanding and desire for planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these.

The Results of the Sermon Series

The sermon allowed church leaders to assess whether or not the sermons were tailored to the project. The church leaders were able to determine and reflect on the sermons in a …. The church leaders at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. consisted of seven individuals who held positions in the church such as ministers, elders,

deacon, mothers, and trustee. The leaders in the church convened to discuss the sermons series and evaluated the following questions as it pertains to the sermon series: based on the data collected 100 percent of the leaders felt that members clearly understood the call for loving all of God's people; 100 percent of the leaders know the difference between being inclusive and exclusive; 100 percent of the leaders believed that the they understood their role and responsibility to the local church; 100 percent of leaders believed that members are ready to revive the church's call to welcoming, accepting and loving all people; 68 percent of the church leaders felt that members sense a call to speak truth to the oppressive realities of others; 100 percent of the leaders felt that a prophetic preaching hermeneutic is needed to liberate an oppressed individual; 97 percent of the leaders felt that the church should have a social consciousness while 3 percent disagree.

During the sermon evaluation the researcher discovered a significant consensus by the leaders as it relates to the preaching and teaching moment that deals with hospitality, acceptance, welcome and love, which was found in the cultural diversity that all persons share. Among the many dialogues offered, one leader, stated that the church [Cathedral of Praise] was his last resort and he do not know what he would have done if it had not been for the Cathedral of Praise. Another leader acknowledged while dialoguing that sermon series was transformative and empowered him to respond to injustices. As a result of this sermon evaluation segment, leaders were challenged to spring forward with prophetic awareness and action to draw all persons into the kingdom of God regardless of their said differences.

The Results of the Exit Interviews

Once the project was completed, the context associates were given the chance to evaluate the total project. The context associates were candid in their responses to the project and as a result here are the conclusions from the exit interviews: 97 percent of the context associates felt the lectures influenced the participants to become a social conscious church; 100 percent of the context associates understood the projects purpose; 100 percent of the context associates realized their roles to the members and responsibility to the community; 100 percent of the context associates felt that preaching summons people to act which is transformative; 97 percent of the context associates felt that the congregation should be transformative in the way it treats one another while 3 percent disagrees. Of the context associates who responded to issues of outreach ministry, 97 percent believe that doing outreach ministry advances the underlying theme while 3 percent disagreed; 100 percent of the context associates felt that planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these prompts individuals in the church to move from less concerned to action; 97 percent of the context associates understands the church as a place of empowerment and transformation while 3 percent disagreed; 100 percent of the context associates believed that the Cathedral of Praise has revived its prophetic role during the preaching moment; 100 percent of the context associates is ready to demonstrate the essence of planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these.

Data Validity Analysis

In his book, *Research Design*, John W. Creswell once stated, "The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data (some qualitative researchers like to think of this as peeling back the layers of an onion), representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data."[1] Therefore in order to peel back the layers of an onion as Creswell puts it, the researcher selected three sources, a pretest and posttest questionnaire, sermon questionnaire and an exit interview, to use in order to confirm the legitimacy of the statistics that was gathered during the process of the project. The statistical data that was collected provides a basis for the existence of this project.

In May, the researcher selected at least three observers (context associates) who were members of the congregation to collect the data from both the sermon questionnaire and the exit interview. These results were compiled from the pretest and posttest questionnaire. Once the raw data was gathered, then it was given to another context associate, Taryn Haley, who interpreted the data. The researcher could have very well compiled the data together and interpreted it for the final findings of the project. However, the researcher wanted to keep the integrity of the project's findings and so it was given to the context associate who was skilled in the area of statistical analysis and held an advanced degree or extensive experience in research and statistical analysis.

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[1]John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009), 183.

Once the context associates completed their task in compiling and interpreting the data, the results and interpretation of the data was given to the researcher and it was determined that the data collected confirmed the researcher's theory. What was identified as the confirmation results of the findings were the underlining themes: *the church has lost its connection in being a hospitable place of worship because individuals believe they have not been accepted in the church, the response of the people and the pulpit to this matter is that everyone should be accepted, welcome, and loved regardless of their specific differences and that there should be more teaching and preaching that educates people on cultural diversity and cultural awareness, and in demonstrating the five-star excellence approach, the church, pastor, staff and leaders should display friendliness to all persons who attend its services.*

The central themes arising from this data collection and project denotes that the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. is challenging traditional religious barriers and is being a voice for the oppressed [those considered to be the least of these] and the church is ready to demonstrate the essence of being a true "Whosoever will, let them come" church. One of the observers noticed the significant increase in question *Ten* where individuals have identified that they often times experienced social oppression and spiritual oppression. A second observer recognized from the findings in question *Eleven* that the majority of the respondents agree that the church is not a place where negativity and mistreatment should prevail.

Finally, the last observer discovered several thematic elements from the exit interviews; being that the Cathedral of Praise has revived her prophetic voice in the preaching moment in question *Nine* and in question *Seven,* the congregation understands

that in planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these causes them to move from apathy to action. What the context associates gathered during this process is the fact that the data points out a positive change during the dissertation process. These themes that are highlighted throughout this project had reflected the main recurring themes mentioned by the context associates and members through the evaluation of the data. This is no doubt a confirmation of the researcher's hypothesis that the church should be a five star welcoming congregation even for the least of these.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

This project was implemented to investigate the need for planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. What was collected from the final findings and used as data reflects that the project had accomplished what it set out to do. Although the project had succeeded in its endeavor, the researcher gained a wealth of knowledge throughout this process from the participant's to the researcher's observation. In this model, the researcher pinpointed numerous issues and also identified several improvements.

Some of the issues identified from the researcher were that although thirty-one respondents participated in the project, the other members of the church were not able to participate because of prior engagements. Out of those who initially said they would participate, only thirty-one respondents actually followed through. The researcher had to utilize several context associates for numerous tasks because of the absence of other context associates who were not able to be a part of the project. Thus, those individuals who were absent were not able to glean from the lectures, sermons, and focus group session during the course of this project.

Another issue that the researcher noticed was how some of the respondents interpreted the survey questionnaire. One member from the researcher's congregation pointed out the fact that there should have been more challenging questions that sparked

controversial topics, which may have given a different data collection. The researcher wanted to make the survey questionnaire general, which covers a wide range of categories rather than being very specific and leaving certain categories out as it relates to acceptance and welcoming of people. The member felt that may be if given a specific category to choose from regarding accepting and welcoming individuals then may be the data would have reflected a different demographical sketch from the respondents. In the future, the researcher would take that thought into consideration in order to challenge the respondents and get a more valid testing.

Another issue that was noticed by the researcher is that this project is only a portion of the remedy to fix the church's problem. In order to adequately address this issue, the researcher needs more churches that are willing to step up to the challenge to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Although, the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. is just one entity in itself, it needs the assistance of its sister churches and leaders to be a voice that speaks out against religious discrimination and bigotry. The researcher discovered from this project that there were a high percentage of individuals who agreed that they have suffered social and spiritual oppression, they have felt like the church has been a revolving door for so many individuals who have left the church and experienced hurt from the church, and individuals have felt that they have either been victims or know victims who have experienced not being accepted in the church. This is a major need that not only will take the help of the researcher but also the community abroad.

The researcher acknowledges that his former traditional and denominational upbringings at Mount Vernon Baptist Church-Westwood and Mount Gilead Ministries, both in Memphis Tennessee. However, God called the researcher to challenge and break

religious barriers for the sake of drawing people, even those considered to be the least of these, into the kingdom of God. It was at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. where the researcher saw his dream would later become a reality and that is where the heart of his project is birth from. It is through this commune that the researcher and participants become entangled into a spiritual process that will later become a historical marker for many.

As members began to flock to the Cathedral of Praise, it became even more apparent to the researcher to find a way to address the need and find solutions to meet the need. The researcher begin to discover the reason behind the church's mistreatment of certain individuals and a way to challenge the people to embrace all persons instead of identifying those considered to be the least of these as being unworthy individuals. Throughout the process, the researcher noticed that the church had become disconnected from the culture of today and the church, for the most part, has not be willing to embrace the fact that times are progressing. It is through this study that the respondents believe that all persons in the church should be treated equal as such: to be able to be a part of ministry and the life of the church, in leadership and staff positions in the church, and not be judged or discriminated against by the church.

It is through this examination that the researcher identified the mission and purpose of the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. Its church bylaws and constitution describes the very foundation to which it was organized and thus this sparked a great enthusiasm within its church body and leaders. As a result of this enthusiasm, the researcher's tenacity was motivated by its context and church members. Through the lectures, sermons, and focus group sessions offered, the researcher found a drastic change

in the way the members embrace one another for the better. It is a betterment that evokes love, acceptance, and welcome of all persons into the family of God.

The researcher has embraced a new love for the people of God and because of the researcher's obedience God has been doing the miraculous throughout the Cathedral of Praise and its membership. The love that the pastor of the Cathedral of Praise exhibits is the same identical image that the church exhibits. The members of the Cathedral of Praise are a direct reflection of their pastor. God's transforming power has liberated many individuals that have walked through the doors at the Cathedral of Praise. The transformative power that God gave to the members at the Cathedral of Praise is the same transformative power that is needed within the community. The members of the Cathedral of Praise have been spreading the love of God abroad through their many outreach projects that have illustrated the care of its members to reach those individuals who were made to feel like they were nobodies. The congregants have grown a passion to do outreach every month by helping the community or homeless ranging from giving out clothes, food, mentoring, witnessing, HIV/AIDs awareness, Breast Cancer awareness, etc.

Not only is this project a ministerial mission for the researcher but it has also become a personal mission as well. Although there have been some slight resistance from those who may oppose the researcher's theology and stance, to the researcher this has been a great challenge and success for him in knowing that he is laboring in the vineyard and tilling to the Master's will. Many individuals, who are either close family and friends as well as he [the researcher] has been victims of a misinterpreted gospel by many and thus the researcher stands alone with only a few who argue against those individuals who

are in opposition of a progressive theology. The researcher was challenged by God to revisit the Cathedral of Praise's vision and mission statement. Revisiting the mission and vision statement created an environment that was conducive for everyone to feel free in their worship experience to develop a relationship with a loving God. Witnessing has no limitations and it is thus highly recommended by God for his followers [the Church] to go out into the world to compel all persons to join the kingdom. It is with this understanding that the need for planting a five star congregation for the least of these is so needed because many individuals have no other resort since many churches have forced individuals oppressive state that speaks of slanderous rhetoric, which keeps individuals in bondage and with no hope of ever believing in a God who is yet still love.

Therefore it is incumbent upon the researcher to speak against the injustices of the people and in return congregants back into the fold of Christianity. This project has made the members of the Cathedral of Praise more sensitive to the concerns of other members, visitors, and the community. Consequently, it is the vision of the researcher to continue to further enhance the future ministries of the church and community by inviting all persons to exercise their gift and allow the gift that God has given them to be utilized within the church so that edification is offered.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPATION SOLICITATION

March 3, 2013

Members of Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc.

Dear Members:

I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This letter is a formal request for your participation and acknowledgement of your support and prayers as your pastor purses the Doctor of Ministry degree at United Theological Seminary. My project focus is: For the Least of These; Planting A Five Star Welcoming Congregation. Over the next 3 months, in lieu of Sunday school and bible study, we will discuss the Historical, Biblical and Theological factors as it pertains to this thesis.

Commencing on Wednesday, April 3, 2013 at 6:45 p.m. we will have a short kickoff. We will meet to sign up and discuss the objectives for this project. On the following Sunday we will began our dialogue. No particular skill set is required, other than your faithful attendance for the next weeks. Your consideration and cooperation is needed to support this effort.

In His Service,

Elder Darnell Gooch, Jr., M.Div.
Senior Pastor

APPENDIX B

PROJECT PARTICPANT'S BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Project Participants' Background

1. What is your age group?
   - ____ 12-18
   - ____ 19-34
   - ____ 35-49
   - ____ 50-64
   - ____ 65+

2. What is your marital status?
   - ____ Single
   - ____ Married
   - ____ Divorced
   - ____ Separated
   - ____ Widowed

3. What is your gender?
   - ____ Female
   - ____ Male

4. How many years have you been a member at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc.?
   - ____ 1 month
   - ____ 2 months
   - ____ 3 months
   - ____ 4 months
   - ____ 5 months
   - ____ 6 months or more

5. What is your educational level/background?
   - ___ Grade School Graduate
   - ___ High School Student
   - ___ High School Graduate
   - ___ Community College
   - ____ College Attendant
   - ____ College Graduate
   - ____ Graduate School

6. What is your Gross Income?
   - ____ $0- $20,000
   - ____ $20,001- $30,000
   - ____ $30,001- $50,000
   - ____ $50,001- $ 100,000
   - ____ $100,000 +

7. What is your Political Affiliation?
   ____ Democrat
   ____ Independent
   ____ Republican

APPENDIX C

PROJECT SYLLABUS

United Theological Seminary

D. Min. Project / Prophetic Preaching

Sundays

(11:00am – 12:00noon)

Wednesdays

(6:45pm – 7:45pm)

PROJECT / COURSE SYLLABUS

Project Topic

"For the Lest of These; Planting a Five Star Welcoming Congregation"

Project Description

This project's purpose is to plant a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these and will be implemented at the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. to make members feel welcome.

Lectures, discussions, audiovisual presentations, and workshops will comprise the eight-week sessions.

Project Objectives

It is apparent that the church has not fully embraced Jesus' words in Mark 8:34, which says "Whoever wants to be disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (NIV). Thus, it has become the researcher's challenge to develop the church into a place of worship where everyone can come to be a part of such a

welcoming church whose fundamental principles in the church's ministries are inclusive to all people. The purpose of this project will discover: Why the church has lost its connection in being a hospitable place of worship for all of humanity; what is the response of the people and the pulpit to this matter and how to retain the five-star excellence approach in extending hospitality to everyone.

Throughout this project the researcher will deal with the biblical, historical and theological demand to illustrate why there is a need for the church to be more welcoming and accepting of all individuals in order to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Far, too, often the church has created such hostile (not hospitable) worshipping environment where some individuals are often included while other individuals are often left out of the equation.

This project is focused on the context of the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc., in Memphis, Tennessee. The Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc. is a newly organized church that is growing into a diverse congregation and it is rising to become a trailblazer within the Memphis community; particularly with its stance on equality and inclusion. It is within and out of these walls of this church that the prophetic witness is being articulated with clarity. It is the researcher's goal and objective to motivate the Body of Christ to become more loving, accepting, and welcoming in its practicing.

Project Overview

The researcher's main concern centers on how the church has steered away from being hospitable because of many individuals in the church who's theological beliefs has often times swayed other individuals away from the church or frowned up at the church.

This project devotes special attention to the biblical, historical and theological underpinnings as it pertains to extending hospitability towards the least of these. It is the researcher's methods that will demonstrate a more warming and effective way to urge the Cathedral of Praise to be the beacon of light that will create change in the way the church embraces one another. Through the understanding of being a five star congregation that offers hospitality tradition parishioners will be compelled to live a life of love, acceptance, and welcome.

Project Requirement

1) Faithful and prompt attendance to all sessions.

2) Participants will complete the following handouts:

    a) Project Participants' Background Information.
    b) Pre Survey Evaluation.
    c) Post Survey Evaluation.

3) Participants will be expected to watch, listen, and evaluate one (1) book and or lecture that incorporates a Christian congregation whose principles are centered on welcoming, acceptance, and inclusion of all of humanity. (These documents may include teachings from Rudy Rasmus, Karl Barth, James Cone, Bishop Carlton Pearson, Stan Toler, Peter Rollins, Leonard Sweet, Cleophus LaRue, Dr. Mitzi Minor, Dr. Pete Gathje, etc.)

4) Participants are expected to actively participate in discussions.

Sessions Schedule

Week 1 – *Hospitality and the Treatment of Strangers,* Lecture

Genesis 18:1-15

Week 2 – *God's Unity with Humanity*,

John 15:12-13

Week 3 – *Early Christianity and Hospitality*, Lecture

The Spread of Christianity

Week 4 – *How Jesus exhibited Hospitality, To whom Hospitality is given, Rating Five Star Excellence*

Week 5 – *Developing Relationships with Individuals,* Lecture

Week 6 – *Who Should Be Welcomed and Accepted*

Week 7 – *Imitating Christ*

Week 8 – *Not Inferior or Less Human*

Reading List

Cone, James and Gayraud Wilmore. *Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).

Black Theology relates the gospel to the African-American experience of oppression and struggle for liberation. As a noted systematic theologian, James Cone uncovers the origin of black theology. It is Cone's fundamental belief that black theology is a part of the black experience, scripture and Jesus. Cone makes a connection between Blacks and God through God-talk and Black-talk. For it was through these discussions that Blacks were able to gather a theological framework as it relates to their oppressive state whereby Blacks gained spiritual strength and passion to exist under unjust and or cruel powers.

Cone, James. *The Cross and The Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY:Orbis, 2011).

This book speaks of the significance of the cross and the lynching tree and its relationship to the African American community's history. The African American history is explored by James Cone. He identifies the symbolism between the two-the cross and

the lynching tree and he links the two symbols together with the African American culture. What is seen out of this comparison simply suggests that there is life beyond the negative connotations that may seem to lie as it relates to the cross and the lynching tree that was use to illustrate the worst sufferings that human beings had to encounter. However, what may seem as negative in the cross was a positive reflection for the African American community which showed that God was with Jesus on the cross and even in the suffering of those Blacks on the lynching tree.

Lecture by Dr. Mitzi Minor at the Memphis Theological Seminary Memphis Tennessee, January 2009.

As a professor at Memphis Theological Seminary, Dr. Mitzi Minor gives a rather in-depth study surrounding the Gospel of John. Dr. Minor gives the pre-impressions of the Gospel of John. The lecture that Dr. Minor presents gives the story of Jesus, numerous stories of Jesus' ministry, last supper and death. It also identifies the Gospel of John as one of the four synoptic Gospels.

Lecture by Dr. Pete Gathje at Memphis Theological Seminary Memphis Tennessee, January 2010.

As a professor at Memphis Theological Seminary, Dr. Pete Gathje offers his in-depth study on Christian Ethics and obedience to God's love. Dr. Gathje presents a vast array of Christian principles and moral theories on character or virtue Ethics. His lecture points out Jesus' teachings and the vision of a good community and human life as it relates to the Beatitudes. Also his lecture mentions how Jesus commands humans to love one another.

Rasmus, Rudy and Dottie Escobedo-Frank. *Jesus Insurgency: The Church Revolution from the Edge* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).

These authors shares their views concerning the hearts of pastors and how many pastors have a heart to love all people and are committed to transforming the minds of how the church does ministry and evangelistic work. Escobedo-Franks give her viewpoints of a dying church, divided church, and means for call to action. Rasmus identifies and defines insurgents and how insurgents seek to demand change in many institutions. Rasmus identifies several previous individuals throughout history who have been coined in their similar acts of bravery as insurgents over a time span who prompted change in society.

Toler, Stan and Alan Nelson. *The Five Star Church: Serving God and His People With Excellence* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1999).

Stan Toler and Alan Nelson have compiled this book together in hopes to give an understanding to its readers on how restaurants and hotels earned their five star rating. Many individuals have pondered how did these ratings ever come about and Toler and Nelson provides an overview or summation of this report. The authors compare such restaurants and hotels to reveal the same pursuit of such five star ratings as a need to be utilized in churches in an effort to pursue Christian excellence. Tips, tools, and inspiration are offered as ways to help build the church and its people.

Johnston, Graham. *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Bakerbooks, 2001).

The Christian worldviews are slowly beginning to change as churches began to grow. Graham tries to capture the ever-changing world and its culture and present it in a way where pastors and leaders can comprehend, learn and benefit from a society that is

not at a stand still. This is a way to allow pastors and leaders in the church to be able to communicate with individuals of the twenty-first century. This book discusses postmodernity, its understanding of postmodern worldviews, identifying different styles of preaching, etc.

Pearson, Bishop Carlton. *The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching Beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God and Self* (New York: Atria Books, 2006).

As a Bishop, Carlton Pearson goes against the grains of religious doctrines and stands with Christian bravery for his theological beliefs in his book entitled *The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching Beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God and Self.* Pearson, a well known leader, preacher, and evangelist in church grew to have a mega ministry and then later was deem a heretic by some of his fellow clergyperson because of his gospel of inclusion. His stance on a hell-less Christianity brought worldwide divisions in the religious sector. As the man of God that he is, Pearson lost everything for the sake of his new identity as he began to preach the love of God who does not condemn those to hell who were not Christian.

Pohl, Christine. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

This book elaborates and stresses on the need for reforming the ideal meaning of hospitality. To Pohl, Christian hospitality is the essence the Christian praxis. Hospitality as Pohl argues was the main theme of the gospel. It was necessary in the Old and New Testaments as the scriptures expound on the issue of welcoming strangers and it should be applied as a biblical principle for Christians today. Pohl merged both the biblical and historical discourses to better equip the readers with an understanding of a faithful commitment of hospitality.

APPENDIX D

PRETEST AND POST-TEST SURVEY

SURVEY

Please circle the answer that speaks most clearly about your feelings to the statement.

1. I have experienced some type of church hurt or brokenness at some point in my life.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

2. I have seen and or heard other individuals share their personal experiences of not being accepted during their church experience.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

3. I believe the church should be welcoming, accepting, and loving of all people regardless of other individual's personal and religious stances on race, gender, soci-statuses, sexuality, religious inequalities, etc.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

4. No one should be discriminated against as it relates to participating in the life, growth, and witness of the church.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

5. The church has become a revolving door for the community that it serves due to individuals leaving the church because of past church hurt experiences.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree

C. Disagree
D. Strongly Disagree

6. The church should be more of a reflection of the diverse neighborhood in which it serves.
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree

7. The church, including the pastor, staff, leaders and members, should display friendliness to all persons that attend its services.
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree

8. The pulpit should not be the place to articulate your personal biases against certain genres of people.
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree

9. Should the church be a place where you would invite your families, friends, and neighbors to attend?
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree

10. I often times experience social oppression in the community and spiritual oppression in the church.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

11. The church should not be a place where a person should experience negativity and mistreatment.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

12. There should be some teaching and preaching that educates people on cultural diversity and cultural awareness.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

13. The church should signify excellence as a five- star service rating and not anything less.
    A. Strongly Agree
    B. Agree
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

PRE-TEST SURVEY

SURVEY

Please circle the answer that speaks most clearly about your feelings to the statement.

1. I have experienced some type of church hurt or brokenness at some point in my life.
    A. Strongly Agree 12
    B. Agree12
    C. Disagree 6
    D. Strongly Disagree 1

2. I have seen and or heard other individuals share their personal experiences of not being accepted during their church experience.
    A. Strongly Agree 19
    B. Agree 11
    C. Disagree 1
    D. Strongly Disagree

3. I believe the church should be welcoming, accepting, and loving of all people regardless of other individual's personal and religious stances on race, gender, soci-statuses, sexuality, religious inequalities, etc.
    A. Strongly Agree 30
    B. Agree 1
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

4. No one should be discriminated against as it relates to participating in the life, growth, and witness of the church.
    A. Strongly Agree 30
    B. Agree 1
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

5. The church has become a revolving door for the community that it serves due to individuals leaving the church because of past church hurt experiences.
    A. Strongly Agree 20
    B. Agree10

C. Disagree 1
D. Strongly Disagree

6. The church should be more of a reflection of the diverse neighborhood in which it serves.
   A. Strongly Agree25
   B. Agree 6
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree

7. The church, including the pastor, staff, leaders and members, should display friendliness to all persons that attend its services.
   A. Strongly Agree 29
   B. Agree 2
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree

8. The pulpit should not be the place to articulate your personal biases against certain genres of people.
   A. Strongly Agree 22
   B. Agree 7
   C. Disagree 2
   D. Strongly Disagree

9. Should the church be a place where you would invite your families, friends, and neighbors to attend?
   A. Strongly Agree 27
   B. Agree 3
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree 1

10. I often times experience social oppression in the community and spiritual oppression in the church.
    A. Strongly Agree 9
    B. Agree 12
    C. Disagree 5
    D. Strongly Disagree 5

11. The church should not be a place where a person should experience negativity and mistreatment.
    A. Strongly Agree 26
    B. Agree 4
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree1

12. There should be some teaching and preaching that educates people on cultural diversity and cultural awareness.
    A. Strongly Agree 28
    B. Agree 3
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

13. The church should signify excellence as a five- star service rating and not anything less.
    A. Strongly Agree 29
    B. Agree 2
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

POST-TEST SURVEY

SURVEY

Please circle the answer that speaks most clearly about your feelings to the statement.

1. I have experienced some type of church hurt or brokenness at some point in my life.
    A. Strongly Agree 16
    B. Agree 8
    C. Disagree 5
    D. Strongly Disagree 2

2. I have seen and or heard other individuals share their personal experiences of not being accepted during their church experience.
    A. Strongly Agree 23
    B. Agree 7
    C. Disagree 1
    D. Strongly Disagree

3. I believe the church should be welcoming, accepting, and loving of all people regardless of other individual's personal and religious stances on race, gender, soci-statuses, sexuality, religious inequalities, etc.
    A. Strongly Agree 29
    B. Agree 2
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

4. No one should be discriminated against as it relates to participating in the life, growth, and witness of the church.
    A. Strongly Agree 27
    B. Agree 4
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

5. The church has become a revolving door for the community that it serves due to individuals leaving the church because of past church hurt experiences.
    A. Strongly Agree 17
    B. Agree 12

C. Disagree
D. Strongly Disagree

6. The church should be more of a reflection of the diverse neighborhood in which it serves.
   A. Strongly Agree 23
   B. Agree 7
   C. Disagree 1
   D. Strongly Disagree

7. The church, including the pastor, staff, leaders and members, should display friendliness to all persons that attend its services.
   A. Strongly Agree 27
   B. Agree 3
   C. Disagree 1
   D. Strongly Disagree

8. The pulpit should not be the place to articulate your personal biases against certain genres of people.
   A. Strongly Agree 24
   B. Agree 7
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree

9. Should the church be a place where you would invite your families, friends, and neighbors to attend?
   A. Strongly Agree 27
   B. Agree 3
   C. Disagree 1
   D. Strongly Disagree

10. I often times experience social oppression in the community and spiritual oppression in the church.
    A. Strongly Agree 8
    B. Agree 15
    C. Disagree 7
    D. Strongly Disagree 1

11. The church should not be a place where a person should experience negativity and mistreatment.
    A. Strongly Agree 27
    B. Agree 3
    C. Disagree 1
    D. Strongly Disagree

12. There should be some teaching and preaching that educates people on cultural diversity and cultural awareness.
    A. Strongly Agree 36
    B. Agree 5
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

13. The church should signify excellence as a five- star service rating and not anything less.
    A. Strongly Agree 23
    B. Agree 8
    C. Disagree
    D. Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX E

SERMONS

A Need for Building Community

Romans 12:9-13

I was somewhat disturbed by the most recent events that occurred whereby members of the Ku Klux Klan held a rally in Downtown Memphis on the courthouse steps to protest against the City Council's decision to rename three Confederate municipal parks. It wasn't the First Amendment that was troubling but the message of the malignant behavior that was spoken. Instead of voicing their opinions about the removal of the names of the parks, the demonstration turned into a slanderous protest of hatred and chants of white power, accompanied by Nazi salutes. Interestingly to notice, there were various people gathered to counter protest the Ku Klux Klan. Ironically, it is amazing to see how people can unite together and protest against white people wearing hoods and sheets, promoting hatred, bigotry and intolerance but simultaneously being hypocritical for not recognizing the division that we bring when we exemplify similar behavior ourselves. What moral standards are we setting when we are rejecting and judging the very people in our congregations God has called us to go after?

It seems like the only time we have a voice is when the Black race is submissive to the White race or when we have experience some type of racial injustice by the local authorities. But, where is your voice when the people of God are called to minister to those who are mistreated, ostracized, marginalized and oppressed in the church we that we are celled to serve? We live in a society that rejects even their own. Some forty-five years ago, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Civil Rights Activist, came to Memphis, TN, to conduct a demonstration march for the city's sanitation workers' strike in hopes to gain a better life for the fellow laborers. Individuals in the 1968

demonstration march held up iconic signs stating, "I AM A MAN" in hopes of gaining dignity, respect, and fair contracts in the workplace. Even after King's assassination yet today the struggle still continues with individuals trying to take a stand for what they believe is their God given right. And what is striking to know is that even in 2013 people in the church are being challenged in the pews to resign, retire or forced out of positions simply because people don't want to conform to right behavior- right behavior described ranging in all aspects- such as equality in the church, denouncing oppression, or acceptance and welcoming of all persons. Seeing a need for change, King's work pointed towards better conditions for all people. "He wanted to create a nation where all Americans, no matter their hue, had an equal opportunity to succeed- an equal playing field to reach the American dream."[1]

In building a community, the Apostle Paul gives us several moral obligations which are argued in our text as it relates to the church. One moral obligation that is emphasized is to love. He maintains that building a community is not a progressive disease or a hate relationship. But, rather it is a promotion of love and not evil. Church folk have become so religiously unprogressive and spiritually reclusive, by isolating ourselves from new ideas, opportunities, and people, on the premises of a simple hermeneutical suspicion. The world we live in is not fascinated by just your kind alone or by your theological opinions. But what the world really wants to know is can you love me in spite of what you think about our differences? Calvin says, "It is difficult to express how ingenious almost all men are in counterfeiting love which they do not really

[1] *Commercial Appeal,* Editorial: King's fight for economic justice has not been won. April 4, 2013.

possess."[2] Although love is an action, it is something that we do or show out of a concern for the good of another and should never be used hypocritically, especially to the point where you develop an individualistic theology that refuses to include others. There is a world outside of our church and outside of our box that's waiting to be explored and we hinder those seeking a relationship from God thinking that the church is only designed for people who look just like us. According to Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist Social Reformer posits in his book, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, that the church must revisit our theology. Rauschenbusch believes that God is calling us to develop a theology that isn't individualistic but a Kingdom focused theology that is concerned about the greater good of the others.

And despite how you think or feel, God loves and is concerned about all people. It really doesn't matter what that the talk may be concerning your affiliation with others just know that God is concerned and loves everyone. When Paul set out in his quest to spread Christianity abroad, he organized churches that constituted both Jews and gentiles. In this text Paul's collection of ethical injunctions addresses exhortations ranging from the love of Christians to hospitality to strangers.[3] He bridged the gap by building a community of believers in Christ through the spreading of the Good News. For Paul, practicing Christianity wasn't designed so that Christians could be socially and spiritually disconnected. As a person who was once blinded by some phenomenon, Paul reminds people that regardless of your socioeconomic background, your degrees, positions and titles, or how you label yourself, we all at some point have not lined our lives up to the

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[2]John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. R. Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 271.

[3]*The New American Commentary: Romans,* 237.

will of God. In Romans 3:23, Paul writes "For all have sin and fall short of the glory of God." Whether others do not want to accept Paul's philosophy or not, the scripture argues that even Jesus communed with the marginalized and that's what James Cone articulates in his research: God of the Oppressed; that God is indeed on the side of those who experience oppressive realities.

Not only are we to love, but secondly, we are morally obligated to be full of the Spirit. *The New American Commentary: Romans* suggests in verse 11 that "Paul warned his readers about the debilitating results of lethargy."[4] God is calling us out of our laziness and sleeping slumber into a commitment that speaks of the Holy Spirit. The only way to get the Holy Spirit is that you have to receive it and when you receive it, its life changing. It alters every fiber of your being. It causes you to change the way you walk, the way you talk and the way you think. As a servant of Christ, it alters your vocabulary and summons to you to rejoice. No matter how I feel or how high the odds are stacked up against me, I am called to rejoice. When I use to say I can't, but now I find myself saying, "I can do all things through Christ that gives me strength." I use to say I'm sick but now I find myself saying, "He was wounded for my transgression, bruised for my iniquities and by his stripes I am healed." I use to be broke but I find myself declaring, "My God shall supply all of my needs."

You may not think you have a reason to rejoice but let me give you a reason to rejoice! One reason being that God delivered you from your oppressors. When you could have succumbed to the attacks of your oppressors or swallowed up in your mess, God endowed you with favor and so he sent Paul to give you a word that changes the

[4]*The New American Commentary: Romans,* 237-238.

atmosphere. Secondly, God has given you hope; an anticipation of victory; a promise in fulfillment; an expectation of success. Your life may not be all what you expect it to be and trouble may be on every hand, but in the time of distress I hear God whispering "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad because great is your reward."

Building a community not only morally obligates you to love, be full of the Spirit, but to sustain the environment. Finally, Paul's instruction for the church is to contribute to the needs of the saints (v.13). In other words, be tenacious in hospitality. In Matthew 26:11, Jesus says, "The poor you always have with you." Here the poor is a representation of those who are inferior, indifferent and are considered unfavorable. If not all then most of us in the congregation today lies in probably one or all of these categories and then if this be the case, then why do we try to inflate a self-image that distinguishes us to reflect that we are better than one another?

When Paul went to organizes churches he made sure that he no one was turned away. As one who was once an oppressor himself before conversion, In Galatians 6:10 Paul taught the church to do good to one another. The early church was full of impotent and poverty-stricken people who were always in need of some type of assistance. Often times we may not know all the reasons behind a person's condition or situation but all it takes is for someone to offer a kind gesture in the course of their duties. Your readiness to respond pleasantly to others allows God to actively react to their needs.

An Aftermath of the Resurrection

1 Peter 3:13-18

In the wake of all that Christianity brings, I believe it is safe to say that claiming to be Christian is beneficial while simultaneously unfavorable, which in this case sounds oxymoronic, if you would ask me. The benefits that Christians gain are a life filled with blessings. However, the risk that one takes is attacks on every hand. "Christians who are living blessed know that the more they have, the greater the attacks on them can be," says Dr. William H. Curtis.[5] Thus, I believe many of us in here today can attest that it has its share of disappointments- disappointments to the level of the degree concerning the behavior of the Saints-jealousy, gossipy, self-asserting, pimps and spiritually oppressive. This is the life in which those claiming Christianity have grown to know and love as their faith. It has been a fight I tell you, which over time has made this journey for some, a hard walk. But, for those who struggle with staying afloat the attacks and naysayers, Good News comes by way of the resurrection and despite the disappointing experiences Curtis encourages us all to "Embrace the good in life and celebrate your blessings because they do move you closer as opposed to further from God as some would have you believe."[6]

Here lies within the pages of this text, we discover that many of the forerunners in the early church experienced similar attacks because of their beliefs. Although, the early church was growing and spreading, so were the attacks on Christians throughout Asia Minor. And so, in his letter, Peter, designated as an authoritative messenger and

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[5]William Curtis, *Faith Learning to Live Without Fear: A Guide to Faith and Overcoming Challenges* (Pittsburgh, PA: William H. Curtis Ministries, 2010), 151.

[6]Ibid., 151.

interpreter of the gospel,[7] writes to those Christians who were forced into exiled; forced to lose their citizenship; forced to lose benefits of entitlement and forced to undergo a great suffering. Many of them were persecuted and banished from their homes, their churches, their relationships, friendships and jobs because of their naysayers' non-scatological feelings in the message and ministry of Jesus. Let the truth be told, there was a new movement taking place that the naysayers and even some today couldn't understand and as a result, the naysayers threatened to split the church with their religious dissensions.

Here we find Peter's letter is addressed to the "elect" (*eklektois*), and in the Greek text the term "elect" actually modifies the term "strangers" (*parepidēmois*)… To speak of his readers as elect means that they have been chosen by God[8] and the word "strangers" (*parepidēmois*) introduces a crucial idea in the letter, that is, that God's people are pilgrims, sojourners, and exiles on Earth.[9] Peter lays out a classical culture pertaining to those who have been coined as the "outcast;" even in their civic and family duties and as slaves. What this says to many of you in here today is that you have been chosen by God and at the same time you have been expelled from the very same place God has sent you simply because you have less power- lesser power because of the doctrine you believe; the gender of your sex; the swagger in your walk; the tonality of your voice; the fashion of your clothes and the background from whence you have no control over. And thus,

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[7]Thomas R. Schreiner, "1, 2 Peter, Jude", vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 49.

[8]Ibid., 50.

[9]Ibid.

Peter's message to you comes at a time in exile when your suffering requires you to reflect upon the cross as a symbolic message of your equality.

One of the first things concerning the aftermath of the resurrection is that your suffering will pay off. In the beginning of his letter, Peter writes to encourage those Christians who were put in isolation; written off; thought of as the underdogs; because of their corruptible influences and genuineness of their faith (1 Pt1:1-9). What Peter also emphasizes in his message is that although they were ostracized from their homelands, these individuals were indeed laborers of Christ. There are some of you in here today that have been deported, condemned, and labeled for quarantine because of your infectious theological beliefs and as a result it has left you to persecuted and suffer what some are not willing to endure for the sake of Christ. But what is jumping out in the text is that 1 Peter 3:14 suggests that you will triumph in your suffering.

How do we triumph in our suffering? One way we triumph, Peter elaborates, is by overcoming our fear. David Walls and Max Anders argues that "Opponents often attempt to intimidate believers to change their right behavior or to deny their right beliefs…In the midst of suffering for doing what is right, believers are sometimes intimidated into running from their belief system or running from their circumstances.[10] Regardless of an individual's denominational beliefs, political propagandas, spiritual intellect or no intellect at all, Christ is calling us from our complacency of unconcern and disinterest in the welfare of others and to not runaway from oppressive behaviors. Being a slave to Christianity summons you into righteous living, prompts you not to be afraid and requires

[10]David Walls and Max Anders, "1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude, vol. 11, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 54.

you to stand when no one else wants to stand; go when no one else goes; speak when others don't want to speak up; love when others hate; accept what others may reject.

Curtis explains that fears has caused a lot of people to be held up, held back, or held still. He further add "...the moment you allow fear into your spiritual life, you run the risk of arriving late to achieving your potential."[11] Fear diminishes the faith of the believer and makes what seems possible impossible. Had not Peter had written to those who were in exiled, they may not have believe that they were still a chosen people of God. Sometimes having the courage to overcome fear is an act of disobedience to man but its obedience to God. Going against fear is utilizing your faith, which Curtis calls spiritual defiance.[12] "It is a righteous rebellion against your own messed up reality."[13] In organizing the Cathedral of Praise Church of Memphis, Inc., I would have succumbed to fear had I not listened to the voice of God. I lost some engagements; lost some family and some friends; and folks discredit my integrity all on the premises of being a church for all people. But, yet God is reining all over this house; lives are being touched; bodies are being healed; relationships are being mended; souls are being saved simply because I found confidence in the word of God.

Secondly, Peter suggests in verse 16 that we triumph ethically. "...even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed" (1 Pt 5 3:14). Countless of anti-Christian haters dishonored God's chosen people. They boycott and protest any and everything that you stand for. They will speak evil of you because of your associations and affiliations. Matthew Henry, in his commentary, states, "It is sometimes the will of God that good

[11]Curtis, Faith Learning to Live Without Fear, 142.

[12]Ibid., 21.

[13]Ibid.

people should suffer for well-doing, for their honesty and for their faith."[14] But, nothing that the world throws at you will harm. When you do good and have the right motive then when it comes time for you to suffer, your persecution becomes easy for you to endure. Despite the attacks and the ridicule from your enemies, their scandalous deeds that were once set up against you have to be put to shame because when God is in it then I do not care how hard they throw or how far they try to set you back, Jesus said I will never leave you nor will I forsake you.

Not only does the resurrection produces a suffering as a pay off where we triumph by overcoming fears, triumph ethically, but we triumph in our exaltation with Christ. Lastly, Peter shows us in our text that Jesus becomes the model for rejection and yet is still exalted. Like many of us, we have been rejected on every hand. Rejected because of our viewpoints; rejected because of our looks; our personalities; our race, etc. Much of our rejection has been the results of the sins of others as well as sins of our own. But, what Peter concludes in this text is that Christ's rejection was a means to get glory. He suffered and did not deserve it, but yet Christ endured it overcome fear and to stand up against wicked mistreatment. He suffered for the unjust and those who were unaccepted. He hung, bled and died for the sake of our rejection; for the purpose of our abandonment. He died so that you and I could be free. He died to disrupt society's protocols. He died to mess up your theological beliefs and to disband your individualistic theologies. And because he died, Christ was exalted-exalted above hatred. He was exalted above oppression. He was exalted above disunity. He was exalted above fear. He was exalted above alienation.

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[14]Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1 Pe 3:16–17.

"A Troubled Manual for Christians"

Galatians 5:13-15

Here in this great text, we discover that people have not always been receptive to Jesus' message. As a matter of fact, the secular standpoint will have the Christian life thinking or believing somewhat counterintuitive rather than being astonished by Christ's teaching as his message for us. Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, in their book, *Jesus Manifesto,* says,

> The Lord Jesus Christ is far beyond what most of us could ever dream or imagine. His greatness, His beauty, and His splendor are unknown to many Christians today. This is why a fresh look at Him-a fresh Christology- is so vital. To put in a sentence: To faithfully represent Jesus in our time requires re-presenting Him.[15]

And thus, as we re-present Christ, we no longer condition our beliefs on how simple minded our culture is but rather condition our beliefs on how infinite our God is. To know God is to be subjected to no limits because God allows us to be greater than any pre-assigned value that's believed by man and to no avail, the Bible, an entrusted handbook or manual, has given as troubling instructions for many Christians abroad. Throughout this Scriptural passage, we find that what is instructed for us to do have been somewhat confusing and perplexing; and depending upon whose theological doctrine we are affirming at the moment as our own ideological beliefs, it could even be considered blasphemous. But, for Paul, the most piercing and cutting language has been presented in his letter, which is addressed to the churches of Galatia, concerning those individuals who have rejected what was imparted in them and thus has caused some to stray simply because they have been charged with perversion and twisting the gospel; insisting that the

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[15]Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring The Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), E-book, loc. 163 of 3593.

Gentiles continue in the Mosaic laws. Even Paul, who was converted on the road to Damascus for persecuting the early Christians, later responded to a divine revelation from Christ and consequently, instead of continuing in slavery to the old teachings of the Torah by using circumcision as a basis of ostracizing and alienating people from Christ, Paul is shaped by new theological implications in order to achieve a divine purpose that would one day even free him in Christ. Frank Ramirez argues, "The problem for the Galatians was not that they lost the instructions; they were forced to choose between not one, but two very different manuals."[16] And, thus, being that the New Testament was not around yet, Paul writes in his letter that contradicts their original Christians practices in order to persuade the Galatians to a different outlook.

If you are going to continue to follow in Christ's teachings then it is not enough just to believe but you have to show actions and so, Paul urges that first you must trump the clarion call. What the apostle is suggesting to us today in verse 13 is simply that one must sound the clarion call by having confidence in your freedom. In the text, one came to understand that Paul, who formed many churches in Galatia, wasn't the one who really called them into freedom. In Timothy George's volume 30 edition of *Galatians,* he asserts,

> But the one who called them was God himself. The freedom to which they had been called, then, was not the result of some natural right or the product of a human campaign for liberation. Christians are free because they have been called by God—affirmed and loved and elected by God. This means that Christians are known by God before they know him just as they are loved by God before they love him (4:9; 1 Jn 4:10). Thus Paul could say, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:10).[17]

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[16]Frank Ramirez, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians: Immersion Bible Studies* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 20.

[17]Timothy George, "Galatians" vol. 30, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 376.

Many people God has called out of bondage and declared them to live in freedom. What Paul has professed is that God has relinquished your chains. Therefore, being circumcised or uncircumcised doesn't make you a Christian just like being Black, White, gay or straight makes you inferior. Christ redefines your ethnic identity and you are no longer bound or enslaved to that which had you in bondage or sin.

Having a slave mentality can only keep you from your purpose. The more you are held against your will only illustrates your vulnerability to being attacked and it further shows you how much your oppressors has the power to control you. It is incumbent upon you to stop letting everyone and anyone hold the keys that keeps you from walking out of captivity. Had not the Galatians come to the realization that being estranged doesn't make you alienated from Christ then they probably would have still been a slave to their sin and a slave to each other. What's ringing out in Paul's ears, George simply argues that in v. 1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."[18] When President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, it documented that all enslaved persons were forever free from the territory of the Confederacy and hence the slaves could not be returned to their masters. That's good news for someone today is that once Christ has made you free then you are free indeed.

Another point that he makes urges us to be self-sacrificing in love. Basically the main theme that jumps out in the text centers on love. Here in the scriptures, Paul makes this known that we are to love our neighbors even as ourselves (Gal 5:14). Leviticus 19:34 stresses we are to love the alien as ourselves. As C. K. Barrett has rightly noted,

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[18]Ibid., 376.

"The opposite of flesh is love..."[19] and George further adds, "Christian freedom is freedom to love and therefore freedom to serve."[20] Self-sacrificing in love, therefore, obligates us to a sense of servant hood. No longer are you committed to your selfish desires but you are devoted to serving one another. That means regardless of our differences, our political agendas, and religious affairs we are rebirth and reintroduced as the catalyst to connecting the outcast, those identified as strangers or even our neighbors as being a part of who Christ is. We barely label ourselves as being connected with Christ and subsequently, we want to put restrictions on others simply because they have been perceived as different from us. You barely free yourself. You got one foot in captivity and the other foot loose so what makes you more worthy to be love than the next person? George in the *New American Commentary: Galatians*, adds by saying, "And, surprisingly, that which links freedom and love is the very thing Paul earlier said Christ has delivered us from: slavery.[21]

A great theologian by the name of Karl Barth's, in his sermons, *Deliverance to the Captives,* he demonstrates his love as a means of hospitality to every walk of life in a Basel Prison in Switzerland. Whether an individual was elderly, incarcerated, poor or sick, Barth gave everyone an opportunity for deliverance and he often illustrated his care by referring to them as "My dear brothers and sisters."[22] Despite your presumption about how someone lives their life, your life has not always been a direct reflection of what is deemed highly impeccable either. Many of us as far as it goes, are still waddling in our

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[19]Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, 72–73.

[20]George, *The New American Commentary*, 378.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Karl Barth, *Deliverance to the Captives* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 94.

mess and are continuingly casting our pearls before the swine and yet we have the nerves to strut around as if our stuff doesn't stink as much as the next person. Instead of creating dissensions amongst all of God's people, Paul is requiring us to come under the submissive power of love and the power of love is affectionately contagious to the degree that it spreads like wild fire.

Finally, not only are we to trump the clarion call, be self-sacrificing in love but He tells us to cease our selfish motives. Paul cautions us to be aware of our independence simply because having too much freedom can be risky. It can stir us in a direction where we lose focus and thus live a life that riotous by living a life of debauchery. Propulsive disorders and tumultuous outbreaks of violence occur in our lives out of the premise of our selfish impulses simply because We are free. The enemy wants you to lose focus of your destiny by making you think that your freedom doesn't require a sacrifice. Too much independence can lead to destruction. That's why Paul expresses in this context, "Don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge in selfish impulses, but serve each other through love" (Gal 5:13). Ramirez argues, "We are not to use our freedom for giving in to our worst impulses."[23]

I just came to remind somebody that because Christ has set you free it does not give you leverage to do or to act like you are having a spiritual relapse; backslide; slip up; or even fall back. As a matter of fact, one of the paradoxes of freedom only means that you are easily persuaded to be overpowered by your flesh. Let me make it even simpler- your flesh will trick you into thinking that sinning is your freedom. But, not so, Paul warns us that it is time to come back to a spiritual reality that prompts us to make our

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[23]Frank Ramirez, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians: Immersion Bible Studies* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 22.

flesh become subjected to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, being single and even in committed relationships doesn't warrant us to act like Jezebels; curse folks by acting out uncivilly or even living our lives recklessly by disregarding the very faith we confess. But instead, it simply allows us to conquer our sinful desires.

A False Religion that's Worthless

Jeremiah 7:1-11

Religion has created a lot of negative tension in some churches and by far, has been part of the problem that has been the catalyst for so many volatile outbreaks that bleeds racial overtones, hostile behaviors, and deceptive practices in the church; all in the name of the Lord. For the most part, religion has prompted a traditional or institutional system of beliefs and practices that has been part of the cause to a dying nation. As a matter of fact, Elaine M. Flake finds this to be true as she writes in her book, *God In Her Midst*, reports with respect to the role and expectations of women as it relates to her Womanist Theology. Flake says, "…I grew up believing that the Bible forbade women to wear pants, to enter the church with her head uncovered, even to play cards."[24] For Flake, her God experience came from within her cultural context. She believed whatever her culture taught her concerning the role of women in the church. Furthermore, she did not question what the scripture said concerning the role of women either nor did she even try to find out any other possibilities that the text may have had a different meaning.[25] People have a mistaken belief that a community cannot maintain unless there is some religious traditionalism. Keep in mind, some religious traditions are good, but only if it advances a dying community or congregation. Dr. Allan Boesak, an Apartheid Activists in South Africa, says in his homily to Drs. William H. Curtis and Gina M. Stewart's mentoring group, who are doctoral students at the United Theological Seminary, that "In dying one

[24]Elaine M. Flake, *God In Her Midst: Preaching to Wounded Women* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press Publishers, 2007), 43.

[25]Ibid., 59.

can still cause damage and that's the nature of the beast."[26] However, there are some individuals, like the Prophet Jeremiah, who wish to believe differently that the church should in some way break away from religious sicknesses or traditions that have undermine God's unlimited authority.

We find here in our text that it was during the Deuteronomic theology, which studied the religious practices of Jews and Christians in the book of Deuteronomy, that the Prophet Jeremiah found his influential message as he penned his writings. In his sermonic selection of writings, Jeremiah delivers a word to the people during the reign of King Jehoiakim that seems rather blasphemous in correcting the way the people should operate in the temple. For the most part, the temple was used for religious practices like worship, offering sacrifices, and praying. However, historically and traditionally, we learned that the temple has also been used for somewhat of a multipurpose center whereby Jews were allowed to become spiritual entrepreneurs. Parts of them wanted to worship while the other part of them wanted to make profits. Just like the Jews, many of you in here today have become spiritual entrepreneurs—you come to church to lift your hands in worship, to sing praises and pray while the other part of you wants to pimp, plot, and pan in order to cheat people out of their money, underwear and relationships with God. And thus, you have made a mockery and created an erroneous devotion to your faith that has become rather useless and a disvalued religious praxis. It is within these crises that the Prophet Jeremiah lifts up a proposition in verse 3 whereby the saints must behave by God's standards of conformity.

If you want to dwell in the temple and change how people view your religion as being improper and meaningless, then Jeremiah offers us some propositions. First he

[26]Lecture Notes by Dr. Allan Boesak at United Theological Seminary Dayton Ohio, April 2013.

wants us to consider that it is contingent upon your hope in God. In the text, he shows how deception had captivated the minds of the people of Judah into thinking that their dependence for protection was in the building and not in the Builder. I am about to mess some of you up when I say this, but where you worship or what you think theologically is not what's going to save you. But, it is who you know that saves you. It is a dangerous thing to think that God is confined to the parameters of your building or confined to just your doctrinal beliefs in order to determine the characteristics or the behavior of God. In his 16th volume of Jeremiah and Lamentations, F.B. Huey says, "For Judah the temple was a visible reminder of God's presence and protective power about the city (Ps 132:13–14)."[27] Genesis 17:7-8 explains that God made a covenantal decree to Abraham and to his offspring. Little did they know that it was not because of the materialistic stuff, the land or possessions, that got them to where they are, but they got to where they are simply because God promised that He would be their god. Like Abraham, God has made some more people in here today that have been considered as outcast that God would be their god. The Pulpit Commentary reports, "Superstition is the disease of religion. When spiritual holiness is gone, sanctity is ascribed to material things.[28]

That is good news for someone in here today that is struggling trying to idolize the church and its doctrine rather than worshipping the God who created the church and its doctrine. It is not your church; your religion; your affirmation of faith; or your Christian denomination that you should be concerned about. But, what should concern you is the fact that God is calling you from your misguided theology and misplaced

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[27]F. B. Huey, "Jeremiah, Lamentations", *The New American Commentary*, vol. 16 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 105.

[28]H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., "Jeremiah", *The Pulpit Commentary,* vol. 1 (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 188.

confidence into a position where you can find security not in the structure or church's bylaws but in the One who created it, and the One who created it told Peter in Matthew 16:18 that upon this rock I will build my church and the very gates of hell shall not prevail against it. So, whatever you or the enemy wants to manipulate and create as confusion in the church shall not work.

The Prophet Jeremiah wants us to know that one must come to understand that before there was ever a church, Bible, religion, or denominational doctrine, there was God. Genesis 1:1 tells us that in the beginning it was God and thus, without all that God has made and given unto us, we would not have what we have without him. Without God's power; his protection; his blessings; we would not have his authority to possess; victories over battles; his gifts to inherit. Therefore, we owe it to God to continue to put our trust in Him because it had not been for the Lord who was on my side, religion would have messed me up; tradition would have taken me out; influence would controlled my mind but because he was on our side, I have got to lift my hands in worship and say, "I will bless thee, O, thou, great Jehovah."

In addition to some of Jeremiah's proposals, he also admonishes us to an attitude of impartiality. In vv. 5–7, F.B. Huey adds, "Jeremiah defined the kind of religion that pleases God,"[29] which instructs us to act justly toward one another. Here the word justly refers to fair and equitable treatment. Matthew Henry's Commentary points out, "They must not either in judgment or in contract *oppress the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow,* nor countenance or protect those that did oppress, nor refuse to do them justice

[29]Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 106.

when they sought for it.[30]" In order words, you do not have the right to pass judgment or to burden spiritually or mentally those individuals who are coined as strangers and the word strangers are not defined as just visitors but as defined as those who are considered as the outcast, indifferent, marginalized, or oppressed. Do not you be insensitive to their needs or become detached because of your ignorance of understanding.

When we come to worship, we got to enter with the understanding that this is a "No Judgment Zone." How dare we fix our lips to want to even think about talking or passing judgment on anyone. After all you do not even have your stuff all together so stop being hypocritical and not sincere. It is funny how people try to pin point what is wrong in everybody else but hide the fact that before you came to church, you just got out of the bed with someone who was not your spouse or your lover; faking a pregnancy test to get a baby daddy or baby momma; or when you lied about your dependants on your taxes; or when you walked away from your family; got caught up in a scandal. There is something that is wrong with all of us and I will be the first to point the finger at myself. It is good to recognize when you have flaws and failures but the good news is that God invites us even in our scandals; our filthiness; our drunkenness and our rags into a relationship with God. No matter how irrelevant you may feel, Earl Fisher, pastor of the Abyssisian Baptist Church, says, "God is an equal opportunity employer!"[31] Fisher further adds, "This means if you want to be used by God…sign up! And if you want to know what division you can work for God in, look at your gifts."[32]

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[30]Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Je 7:1–15.

[31]Earl Fisher. www.facebook.com/Earl Fisher, (accessed April 28, 2013).

[32]Ibid.

Another way in amending your ways and in making them good, then lastly, he suggests for us to seek to improve yourself. Here in the text he summons us to reflect on our life and helps us to raise questions concerning the sins we may have committed. We come to church Sunday after Sunday in search of a divine revelation from God and yet we leave the same we came. As a result of leaving the same way we came, we leave with no remorseful feelings like we have no responsibility at all for the stuff we've done-condemning people, passing judgment, mistreating one another, etc. God is holding us accountable for every misdeed we have done that has turned away the people of God from his presence.

Not only is the church a temple but so is your body. There is a lot of stuff that you should not expose your temple, too, simply because you are a direct reflection of God's holy place-racial overtones, bigotry and violence, hatred and dissension. Therefore, everything in you and around you should come under subjection of the Holy Spirit. Jeremiah raises the question—Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers? The temple had become a place where the behavior of the people became a threat to the nation. The people were coming to the temple engaging in all types of idolatry. Instead of coming to worship God, they were worshipping Baal. Instead of worshipping God, they were worshipping the marketplace. The people of Israel turned away from God and sought worship in other gods. Dr. Boesak says that, "God has invested God's own dignity and worthiness in us. Constant attempt to bring God down to our proportions; in our image; makes God reflects our bigotry…"[33] He offers the proposition that if you did not do these things then I will cast you out of my sight, let you dwell in the temple but if you don't do this then I will cast you out of my sight. But

[33]Lecture Notes by Dr. Allan Boesak at United Theological Seminary Dayton Ohio, April 2013.

although they were caught up in a moment of captivity, there was still some triumph that could occur in their tragedy. What the triumph suggests was that if you could seek to improve yourself, then the God that you came to worship is able to birth you out a new vision.

APPENDIX F

SERMON QUESTIONNAIRE

Sermon Questionnaire

1. Members clearly understand the call for loving all of God's people.
2. Members know the difference between being inclusive and exclusive.
3. Members understand their role and responsibility to the local community.
4. Members are ready to revive the church's call to welcoming, accepting and loving all people.
5. Members sense a call to speak truth to the oppressive realties of others.
6. A prophetic preaching hermeneutic is needed to liberate an oppressed individual.
7. The church should have a social consciousness.

APPENDIX G

EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Exit Interview Questions

1. Do you feel the bible study lectures influenced the participants to become a more welcoming church?

2. Do you believe as a result of the study members understood the projects purpose?

3. Do you think the congregation realized their role to their members and responsibility to their local community?

4. Do you feel the congregation understands that prophetic preaching is a call to action which stirs up change in an individual life?

5. Do you believe the congregation understands the need to prompt transformation as it relates to how the church treats one another?

6. Do you think the congregation understands that doing outreach ministry advances the prophetic agenda?

7. Do you feel our congregation understands that planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these causes us to move from apathy to action?

8. Do you believe our congregation understands that the church is a place of empowerment and transformation?

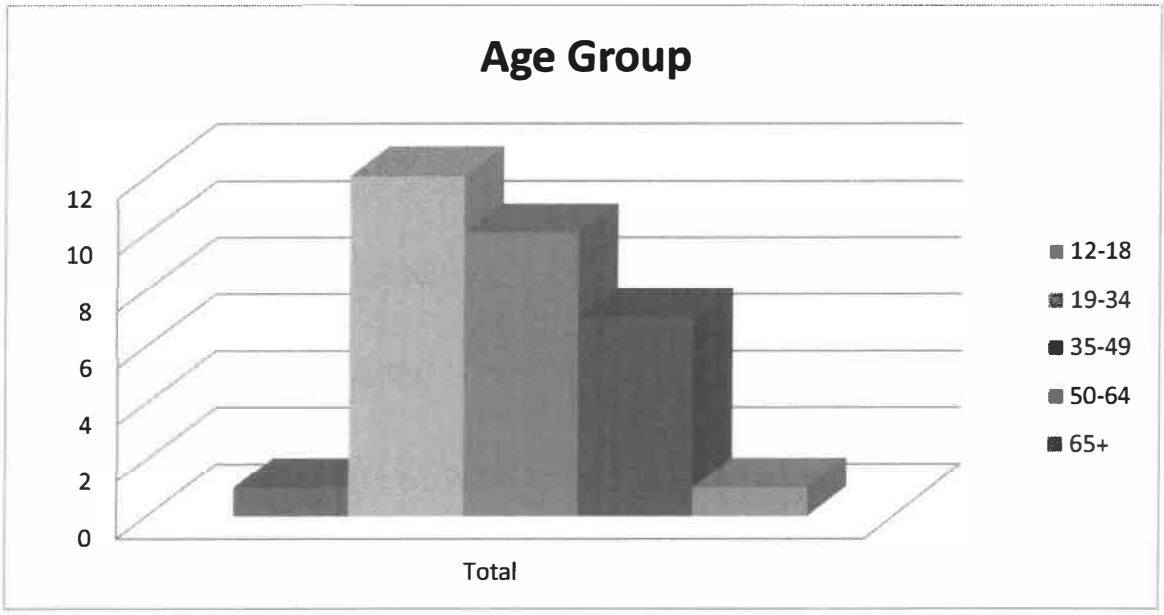
9. Do you think the pulpit of the Cathedral of Praise has revived her prophetic voice during the preaching moment?

10. Do you feel the congregation is ready to demonstrate the essence of planting a five star welcoming congregation for the least of these which is shown through transformative ministry?

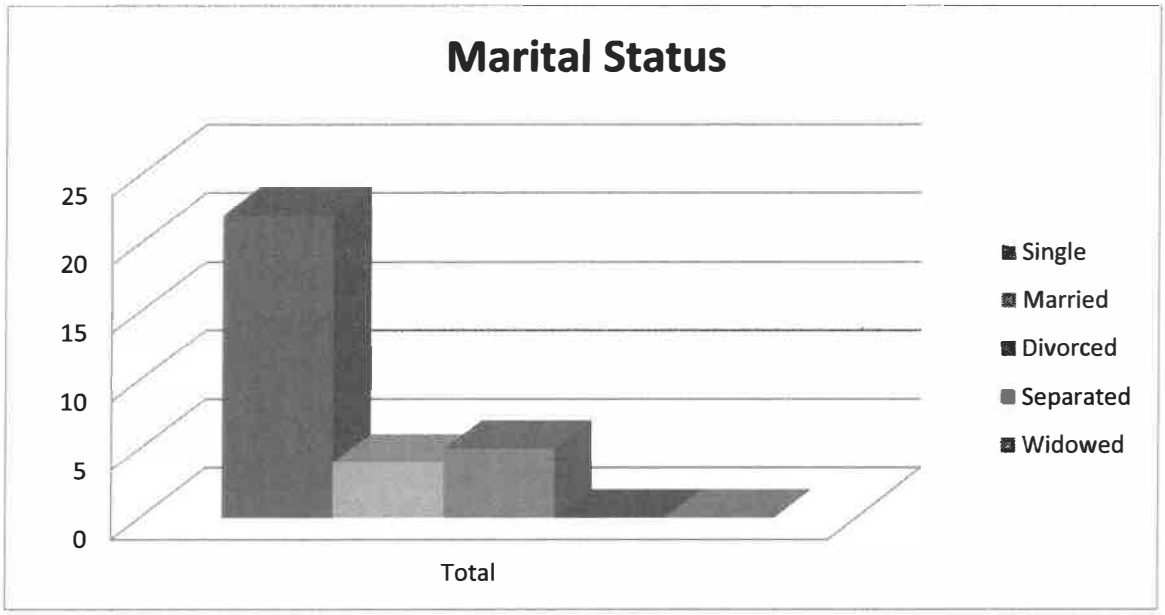
APPENDIX H

PRETEST AND POST-TEST BAR GRAPHS

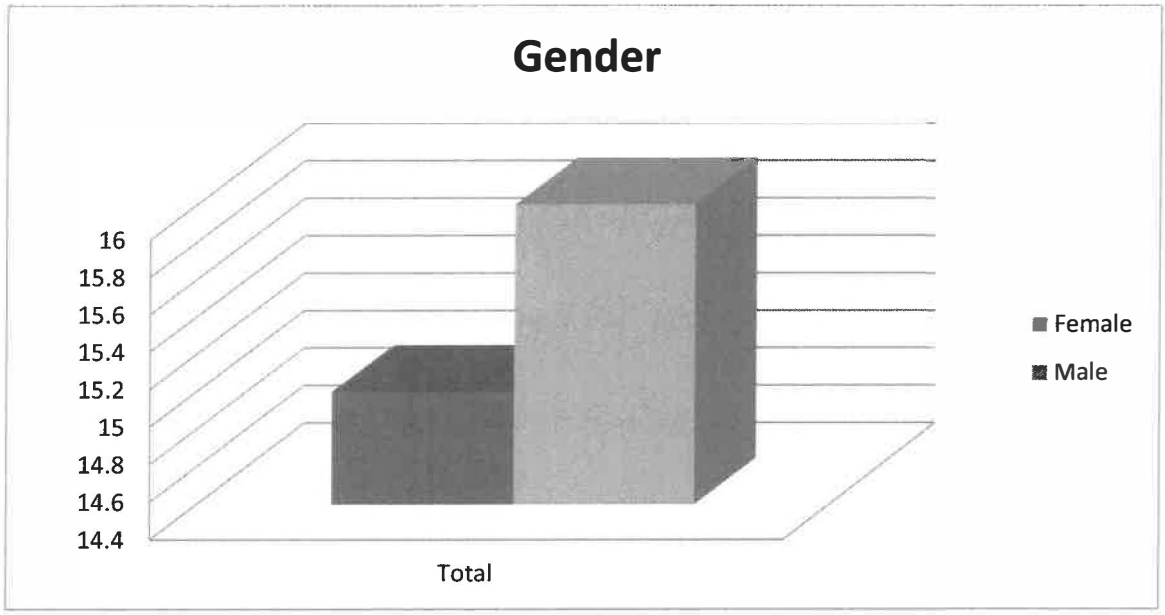
31 Respondents – Pretest 31 Respondents – Post Test



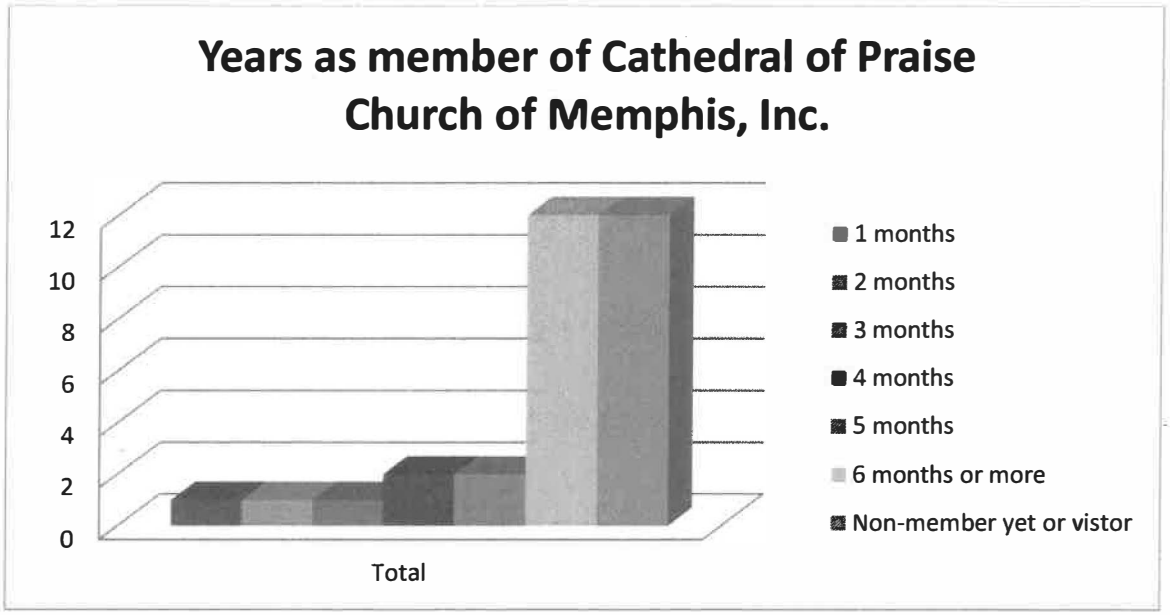
Age	Total
12-18	1
19-34	12
35-49	10
50-64	7
65+	1



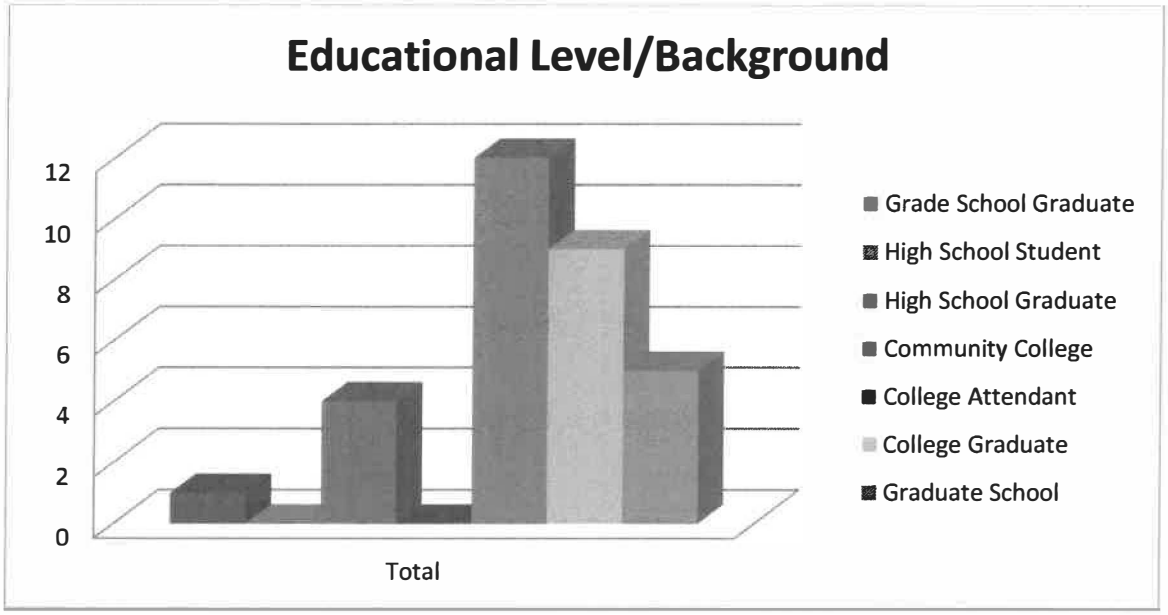
Marital Status	Total
Single	22
Married	4
Divorced	5
Separated	0
Widowed	0



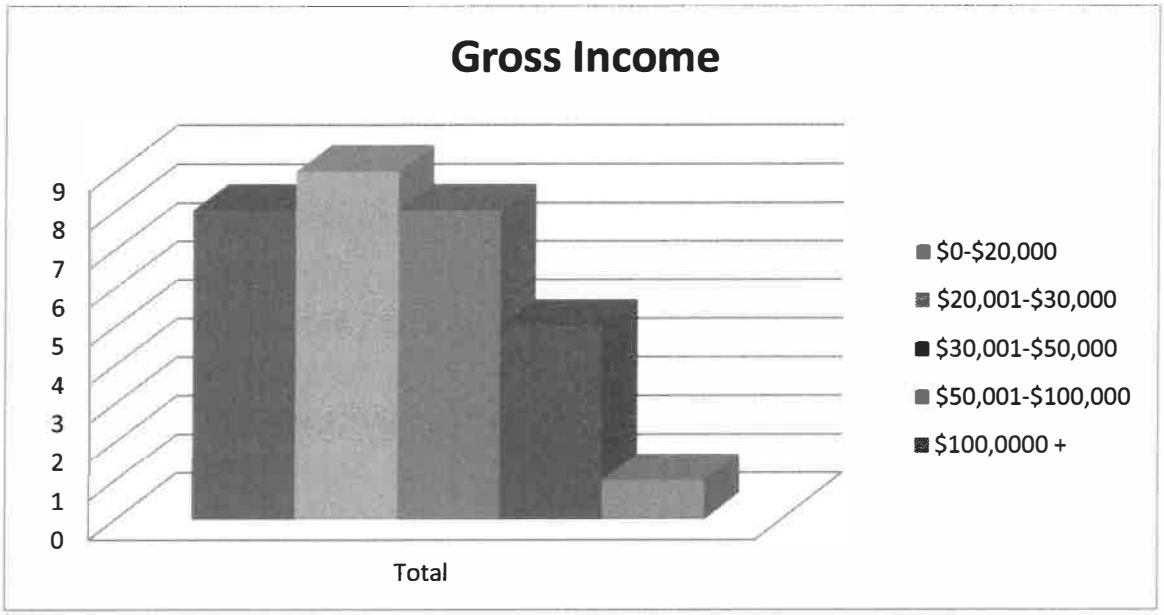
Gender	Total
Female	15
Male	16



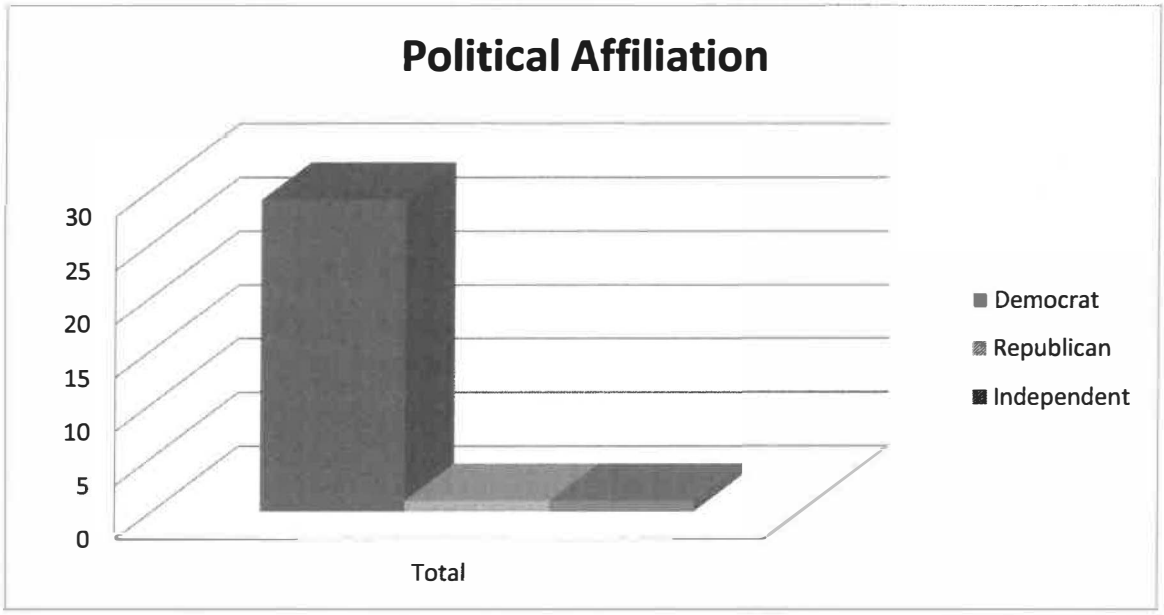
Years as a Member	Total
1 months	1
2 months	1
3 months	1
4 months	2
5 months	2
6 months or more	12
Non-member yet or visitor	12



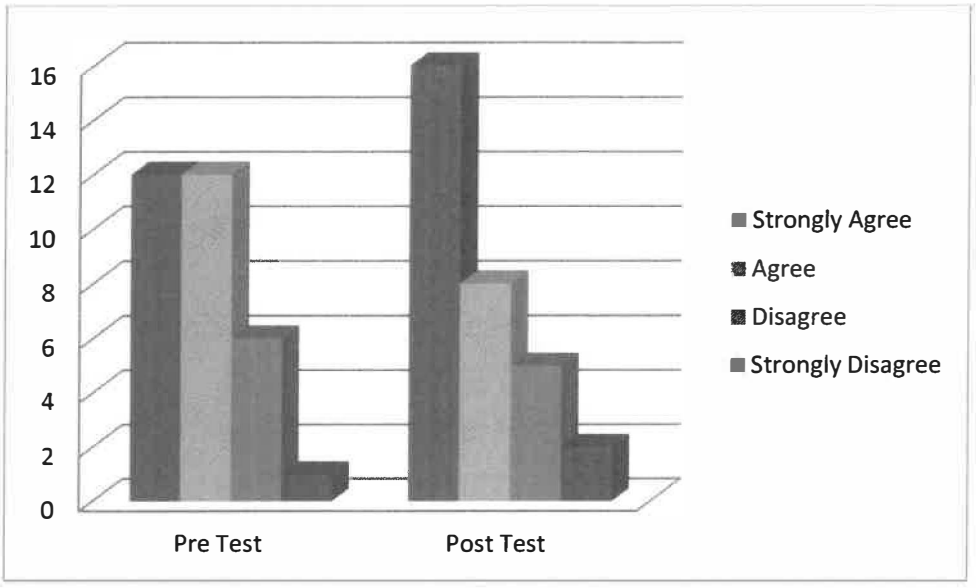
Educational Level	Total
Grade School Graduate	1
High School Student	0
High School Graduate	4
Community College	0
College Attendant	12
College Graduate	9
Graduate School	5



Gross Income	Total
$0-$20,000	8
$20,001-$30,000	9
$30,001-$50,000	8
$50,001-$100,000	5
$100,0000 +	1

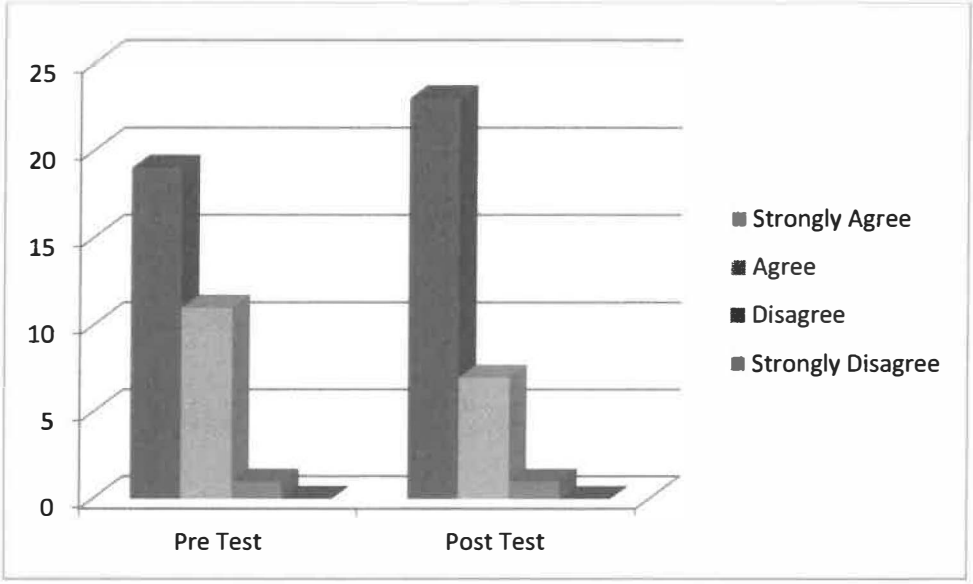


Political Affiliation	Total
Democrat	29
Republican	1
Independent	1



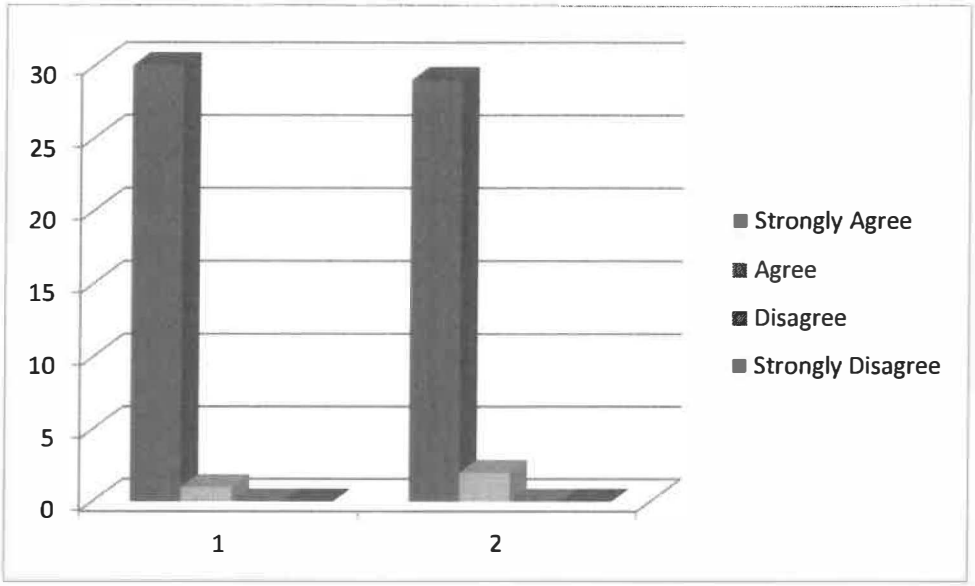
Q1. I have experienced some type of church hurt or brokenness at some point in my life.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	12	16
Agree	12	8
Disagree	6	5
Strongly Disagree	1	2



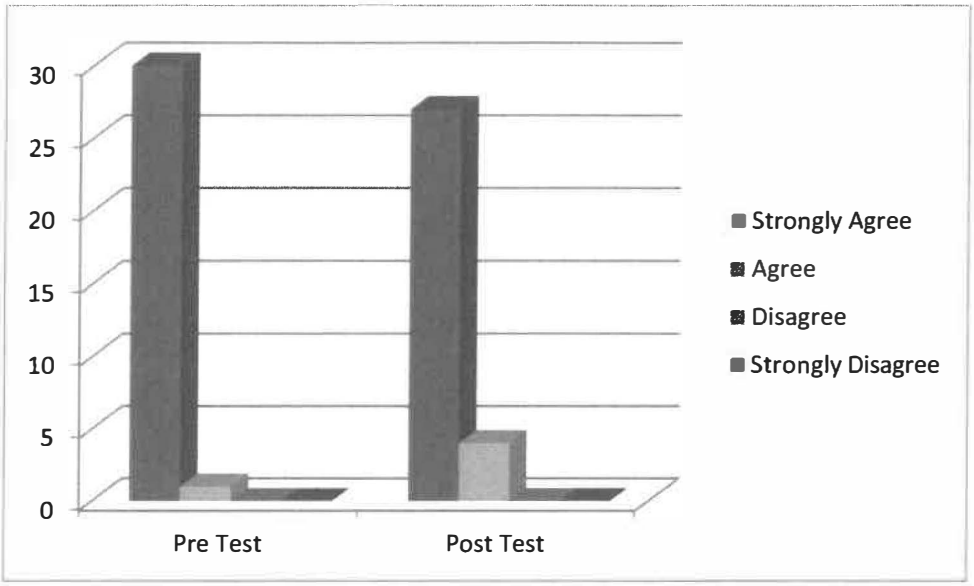
Q2. I have seen and heard other individuals share their personal experience of not being accepted during their church experience.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	19	23
Agree	11	7
Disagree	1	1
Strongly Disagree	0	0



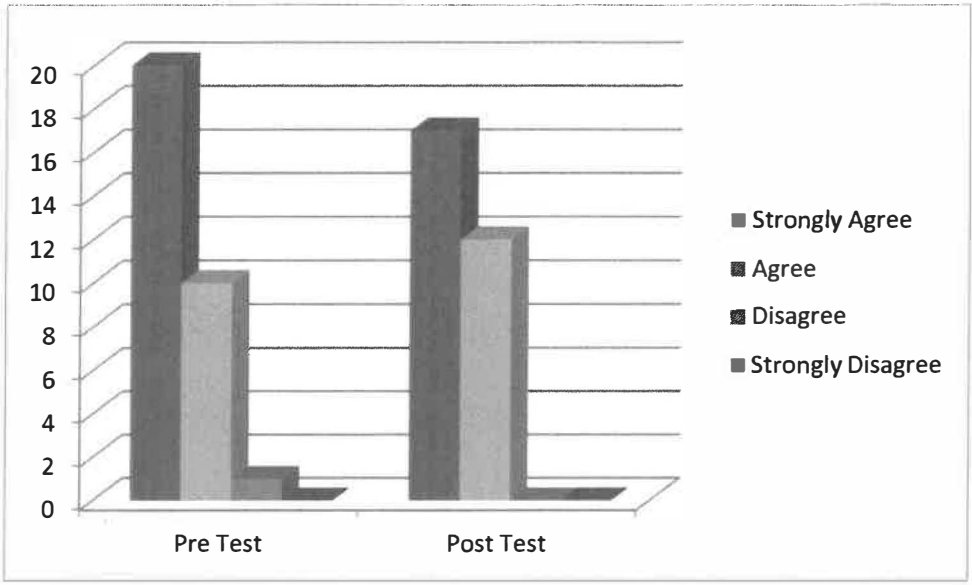
Q3. I believe the church should be welcoming, accepting, and loving of all people regardless of other individual's personal and religious stances on race, gender, soci-statuses, sexuality, religious inequalities, etc.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	30	29
Agree	1	2
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0



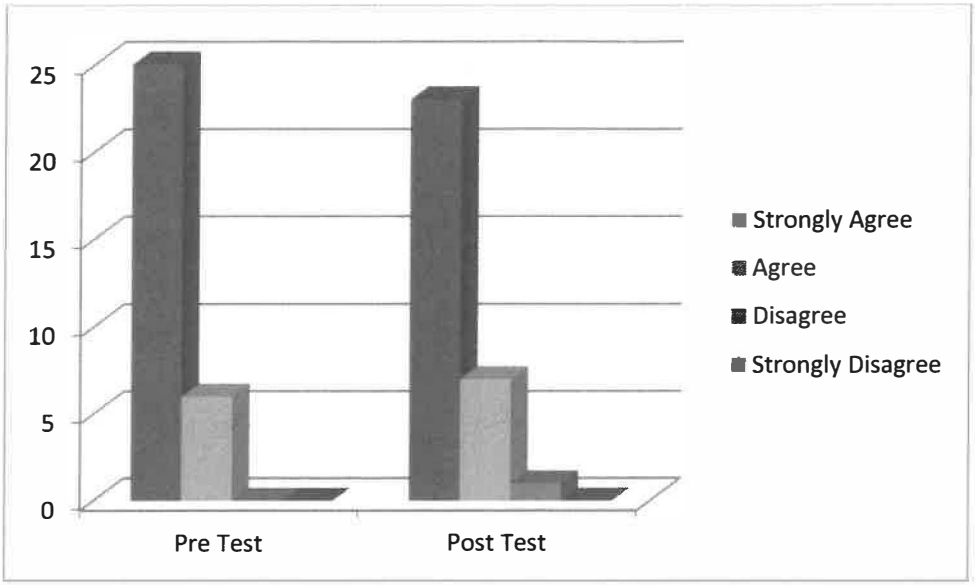
Q4. No one should be discriminated against as it relates to participating in the life, growth, and witness of the church.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	30	27
Agree	1	4
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0



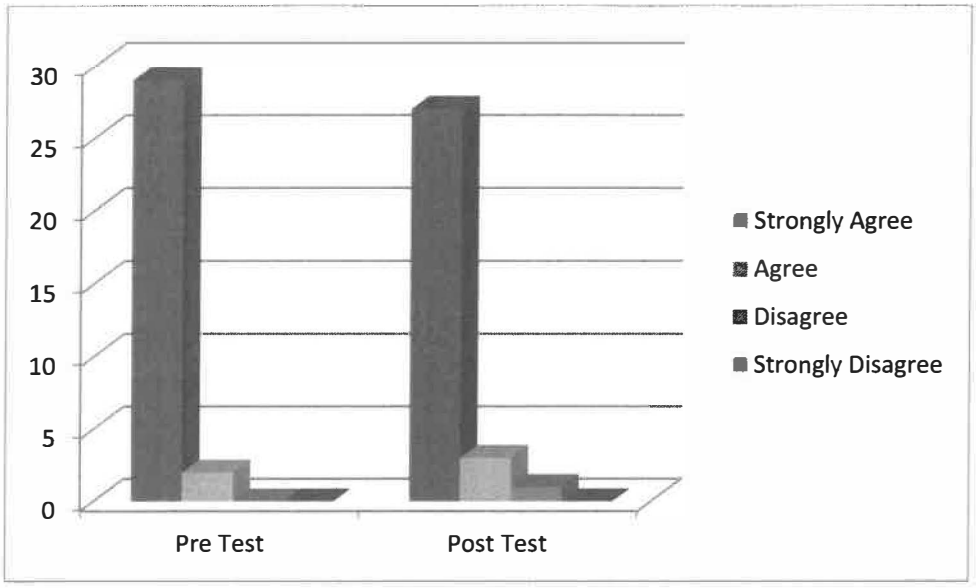
Q5. The church has become a revolving door for the community that it serves due to individuals leaving the church because of past church hurt experiences.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	20	17
Agree	10	12
Disagree	1	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0



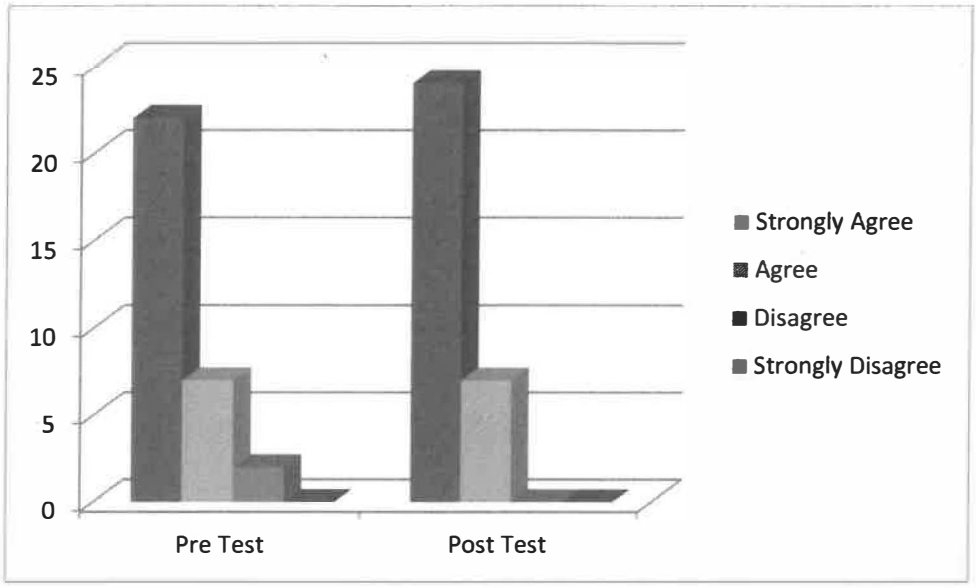
Q6. The church should be more of a reflection of the diverse neighborhood in which it serves.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	25	23
Agree	6	7
Disagree	0	1
Strongly Disagree	0	0



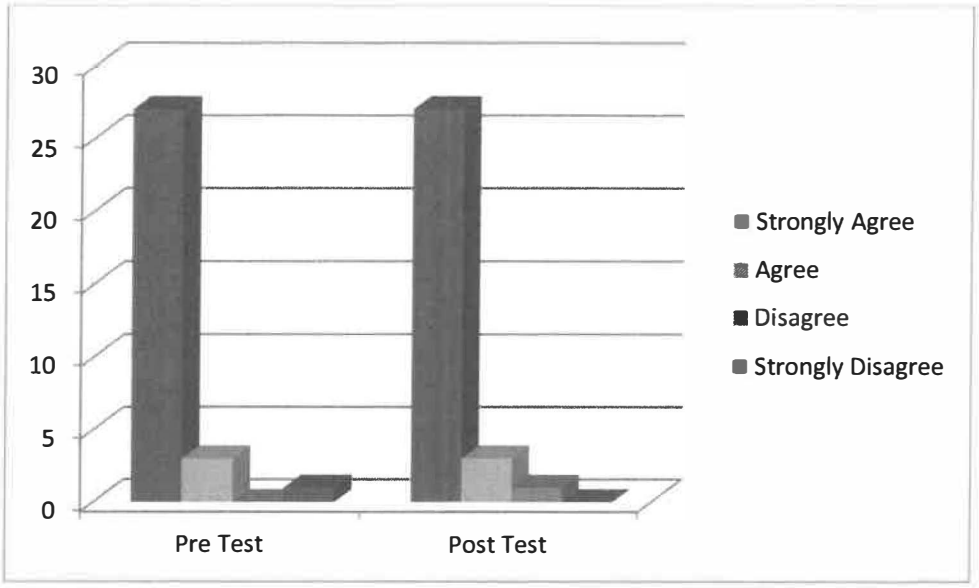
Q7. The church, including the pastor, staff, leaders, and members, should display Friendliness to all persons that attend it's services.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	29	27
Agree	2	3
Disagree	0	1
Strongly Disagree	0	0



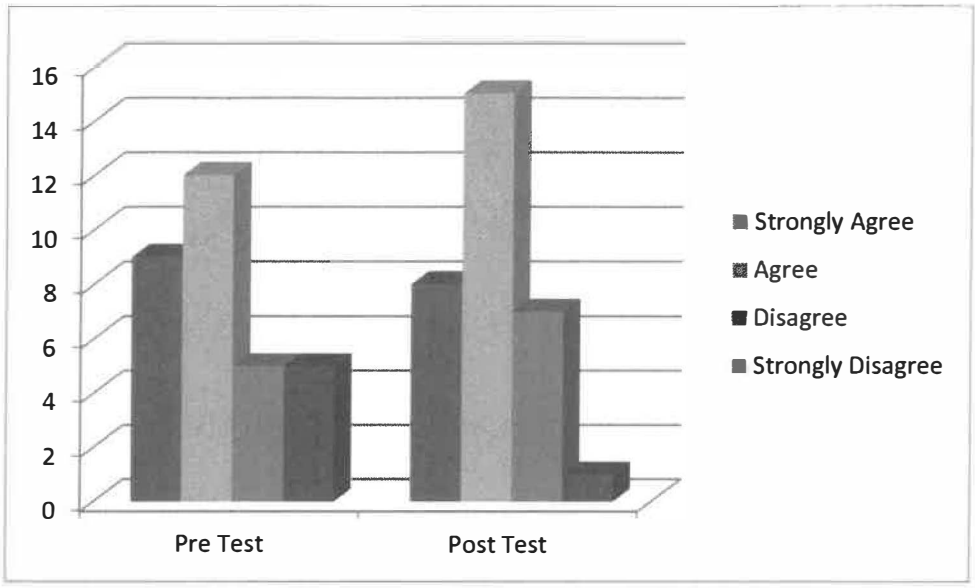
Q8. The pulpit should not be the place to articulate your personal biases against certain genres of people.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	22	24
Agree	7	7
Disagree	2	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0



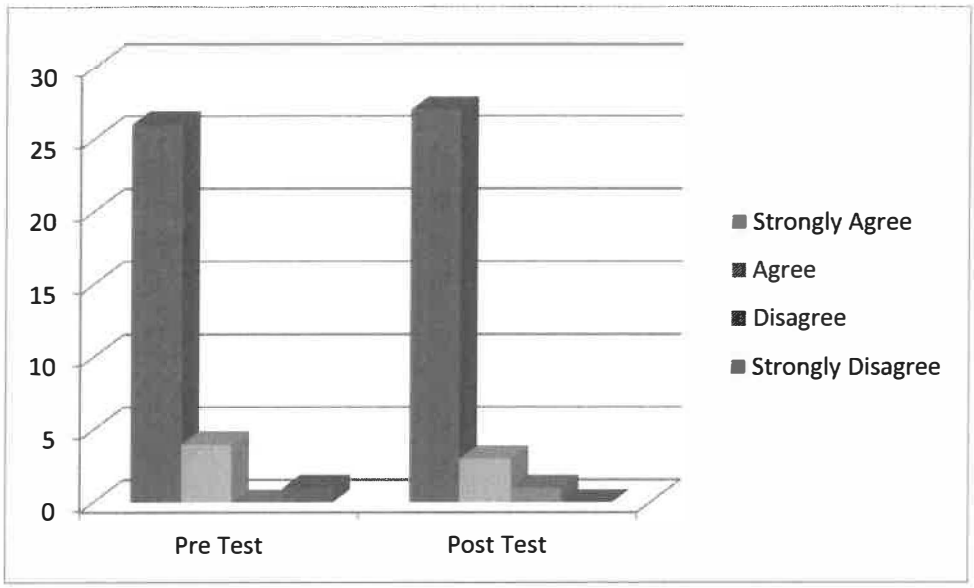
Q9. Should the church be a place where you would invite your families, friends, and neighbors to attend?

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	27	27
Agree	3	3
Disagree	0	1
Strongly Disagree	1	0



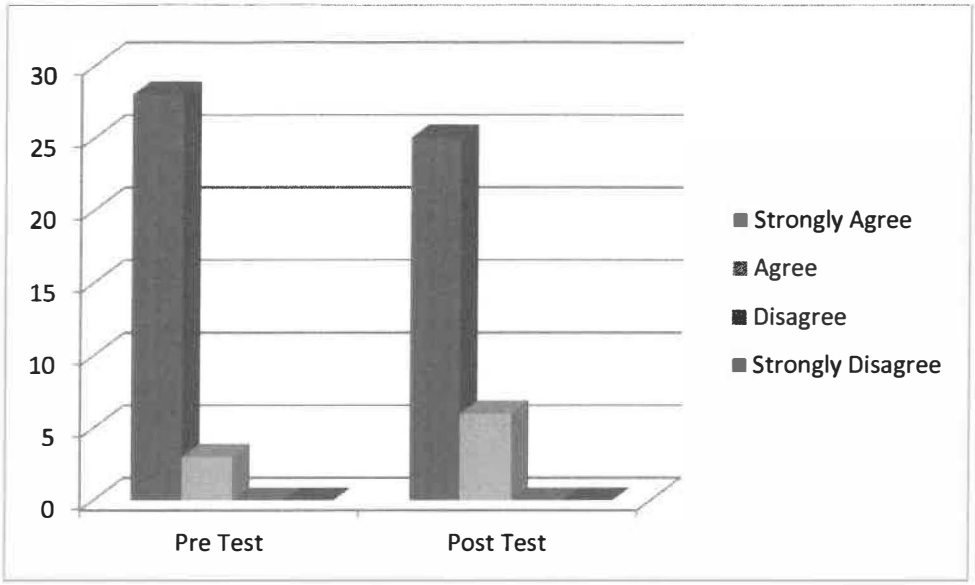
Q10. I often times experience social oppression in the community and spiritual oppression in the church.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	9	8
Agree	12	15
Disagree	5	7
Strongly Disagree	5	1



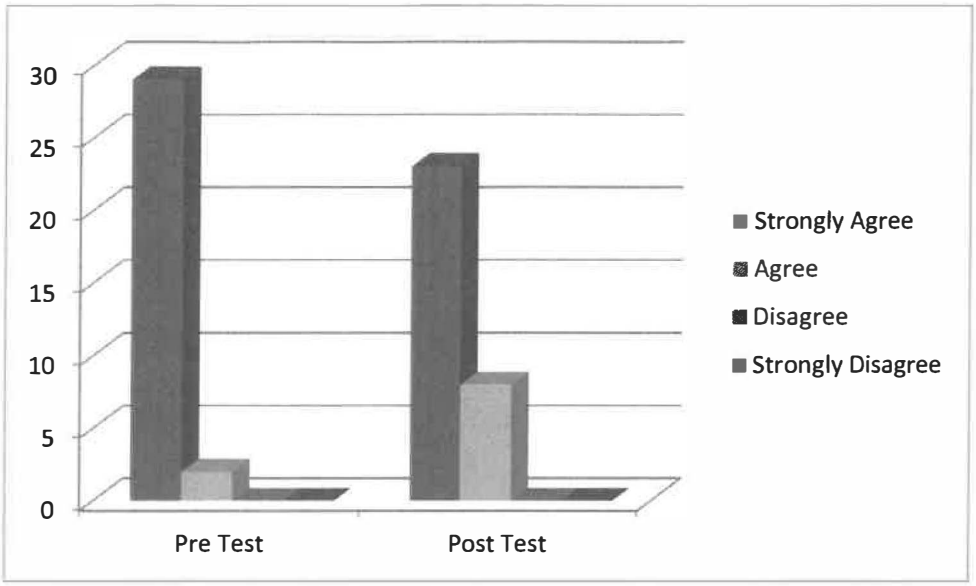
Q11. The church should not be a place where a person should experience negativity and mistreatment.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	26	27
Agree	4	3
Disagree	0	1
Strongly Disagree	1	0



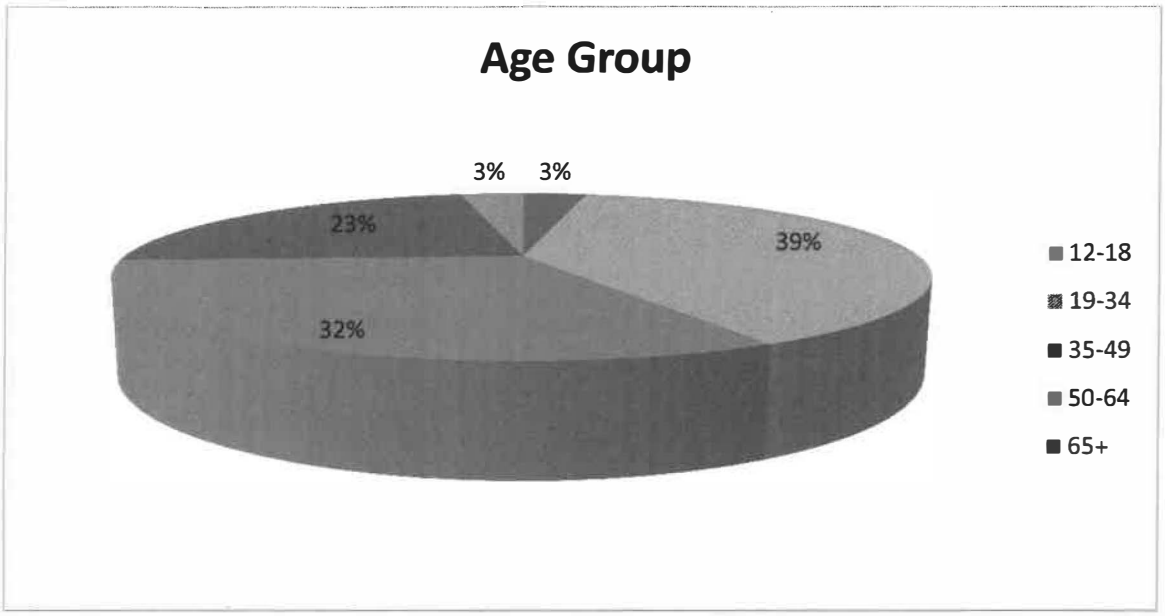
Q12. There should be some teaching and preaching that educates people on cultural diversity and cultural awareness.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	28	25
Agree	3	6
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

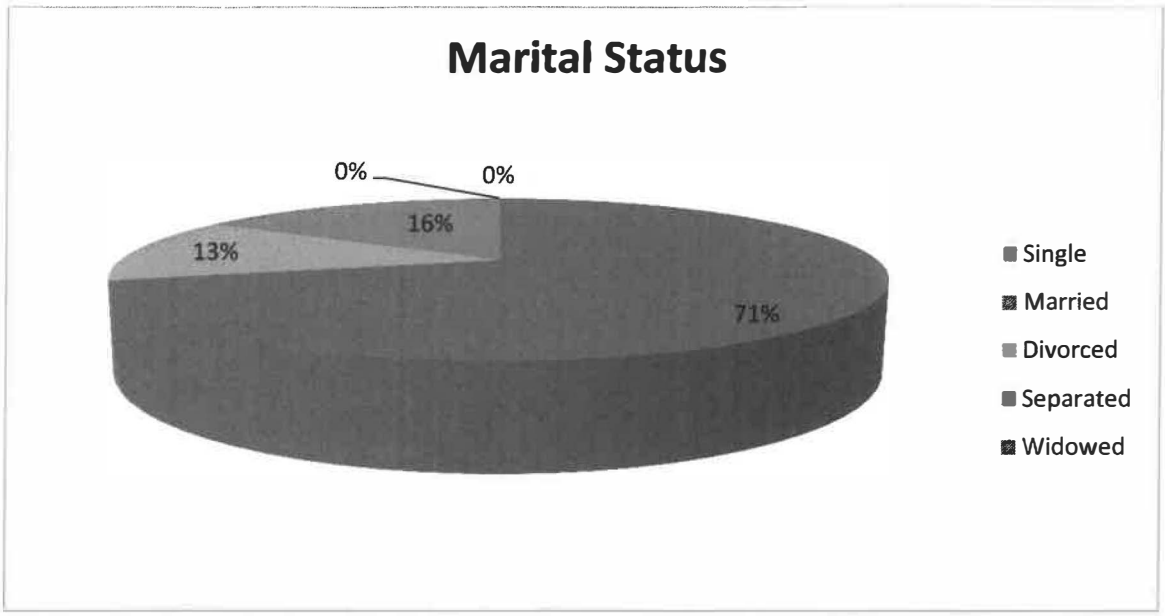


Q13. The church should signify excellence as a five-star service rating and not anything less.

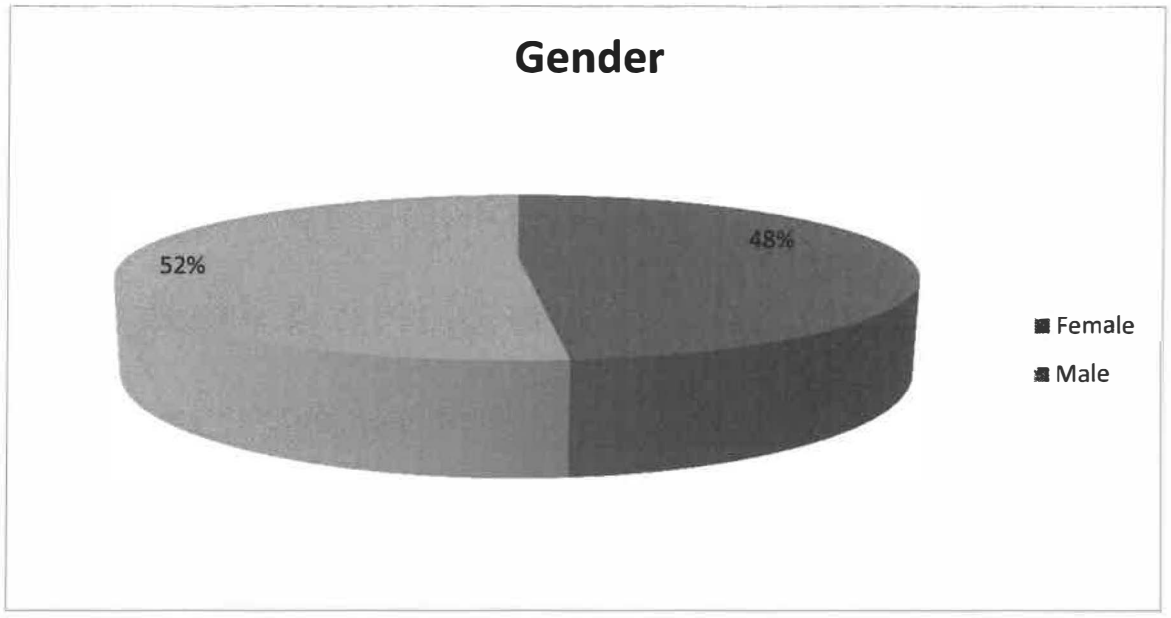
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	29	23
Agree	2	8
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0



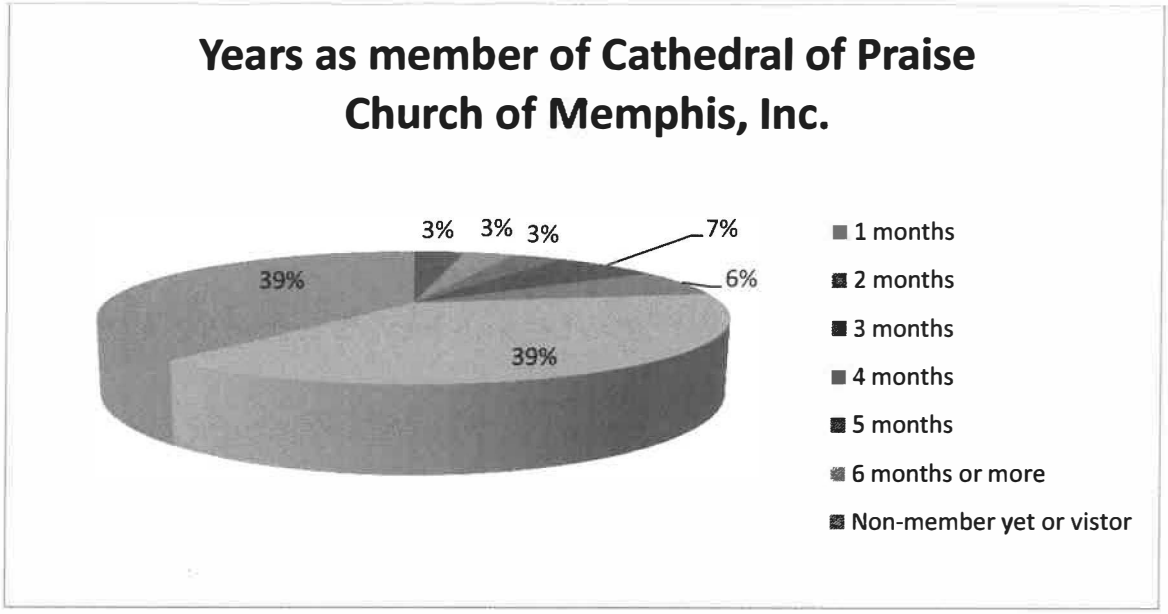
Age	Total
12-18	1
19-34	12
35-49	10
50-64	7
65+	1



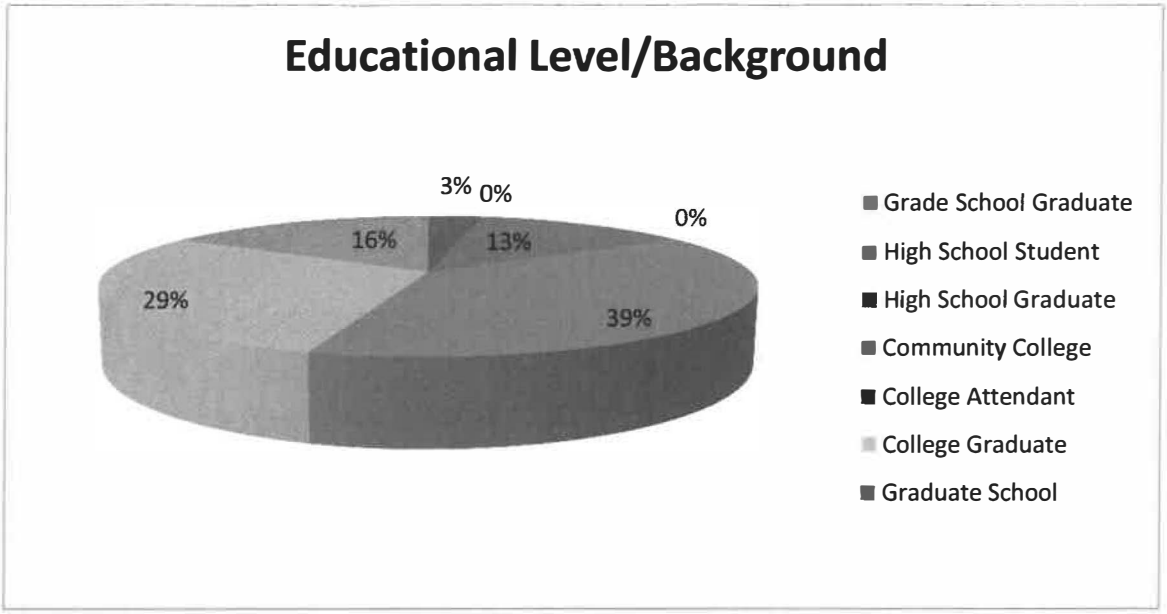
Marital Status	Total
Single	22
Married	4
Divorced	5
Separated	0
Widowed	0



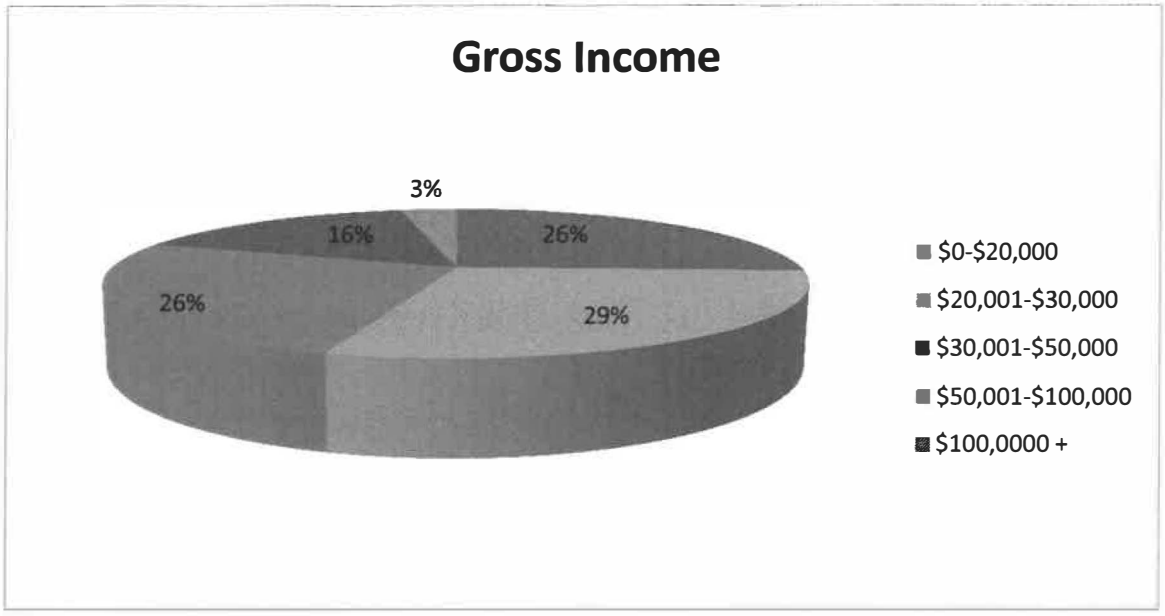
Gender	Total
Female	15
Male	16



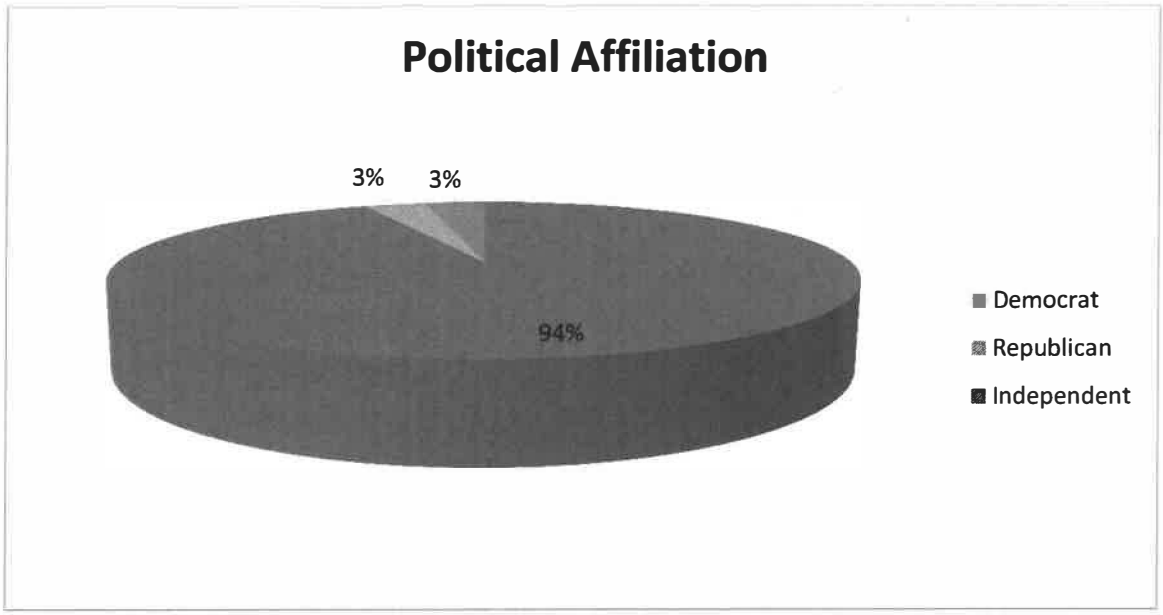
Years as a Member	Total
1 months	1
2 months	1
3 months	1
4 months	2
5 months	2
6 months or more	12
Non-member yet or visitor	12



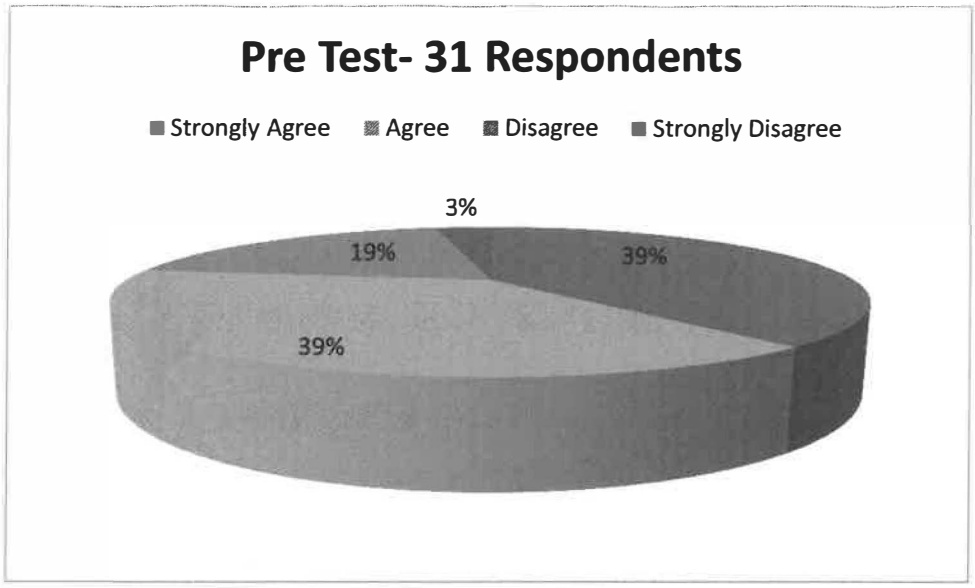
Educational Level	Total
Grade School Graduate	1
High School Student	0
High School Graduate	4
Community College	0
College Attendant	12
College Graduate	9
Graduate School	5

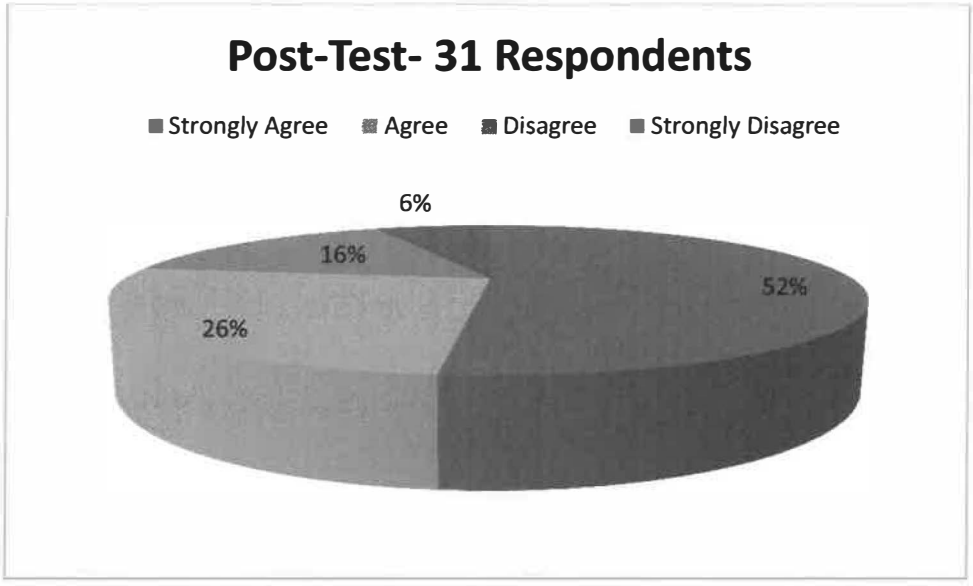


Gross Income	Total
$0-$20,000	8
$20,001-$30,000	9
$30,001-$50,000	8
$50,001-$100,000	5
$100,0000 +	1



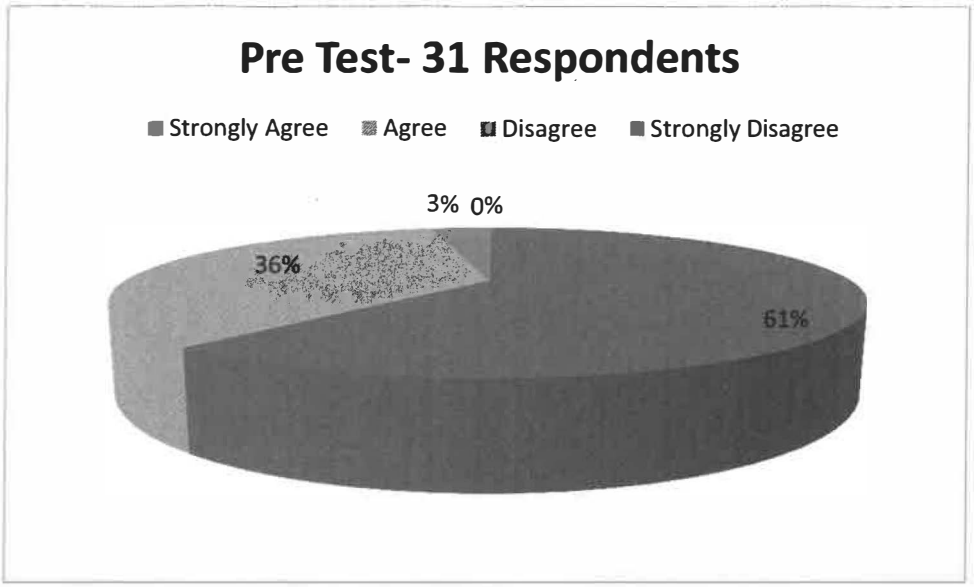
Political Affiliation	Total
Democrat	29
Republican	1
Independent	1

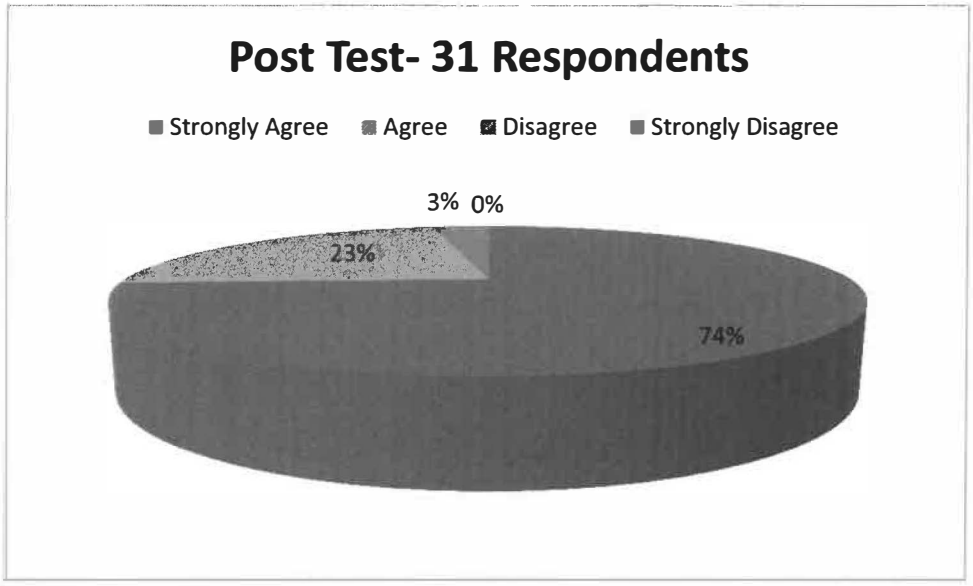




Q1. I have experienced some type of church hurt or brokenness at some point in my life.

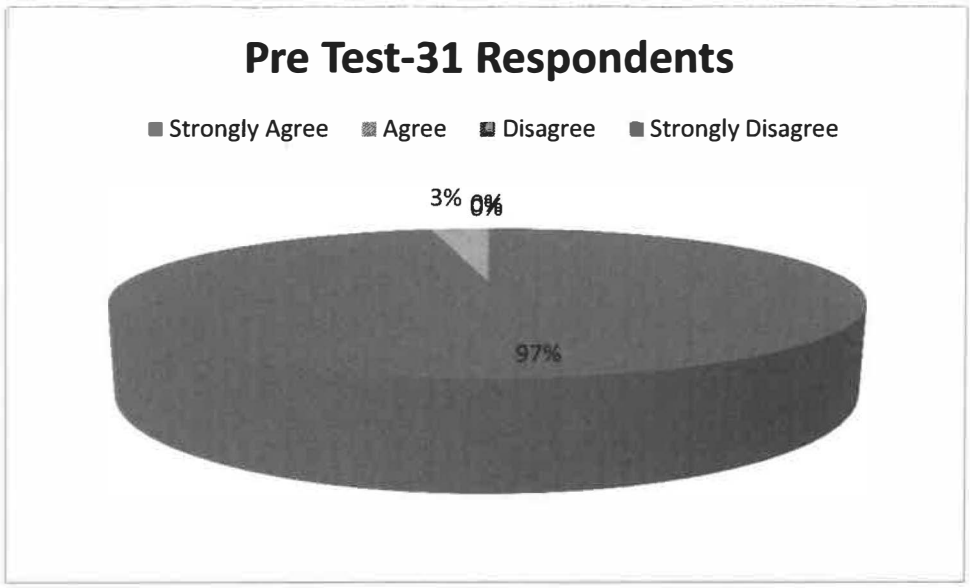
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	12	16
Agree	12	8
Disagree	6	5
Strongly Disagree	1	2

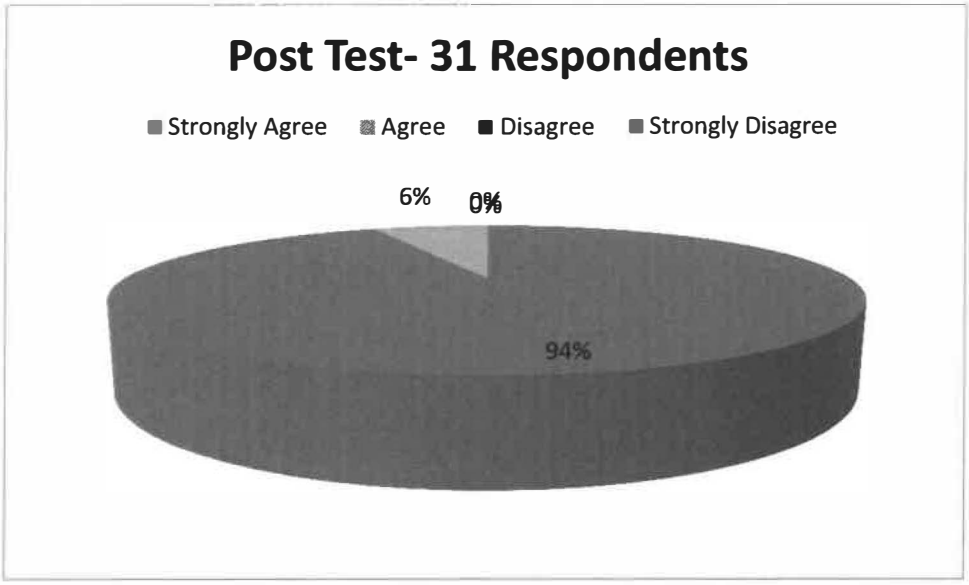




Q2. I have seen and heard other individuals share their personal experience of not being accepted during their church experience.

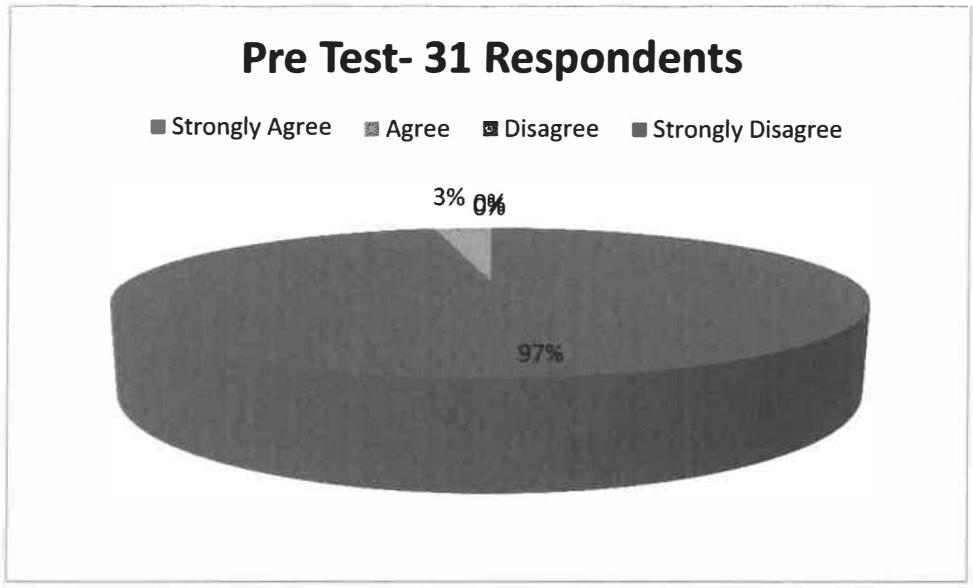
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	19	23
Agree	11	7
Disagree	1	1
Strongly Disagree	0	0

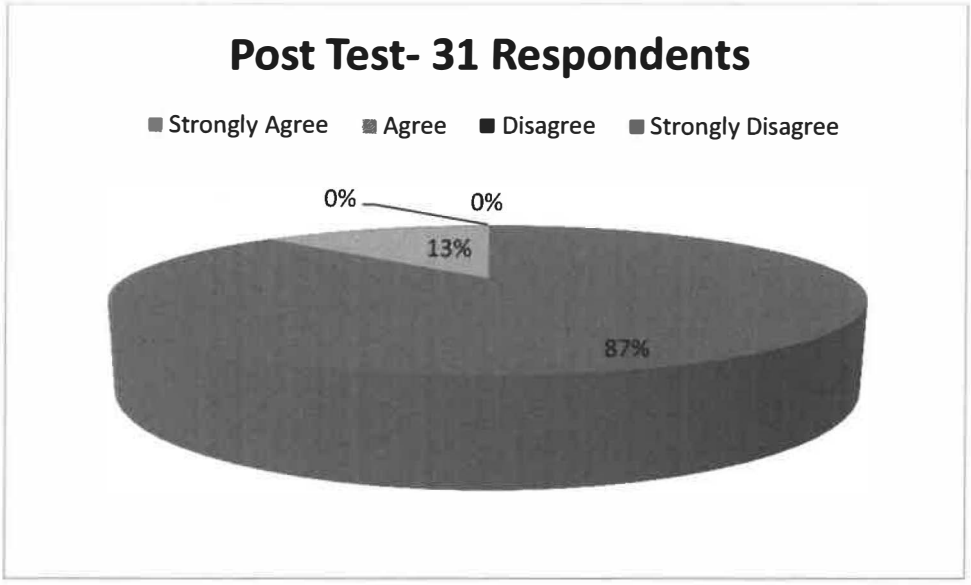




Q3. I believe the church should be welcoming, accepting, and loving of all people regardless of other individual's personal and religious stances on race, gender, soci-statuses, sexuality, religious inequalities, etc.

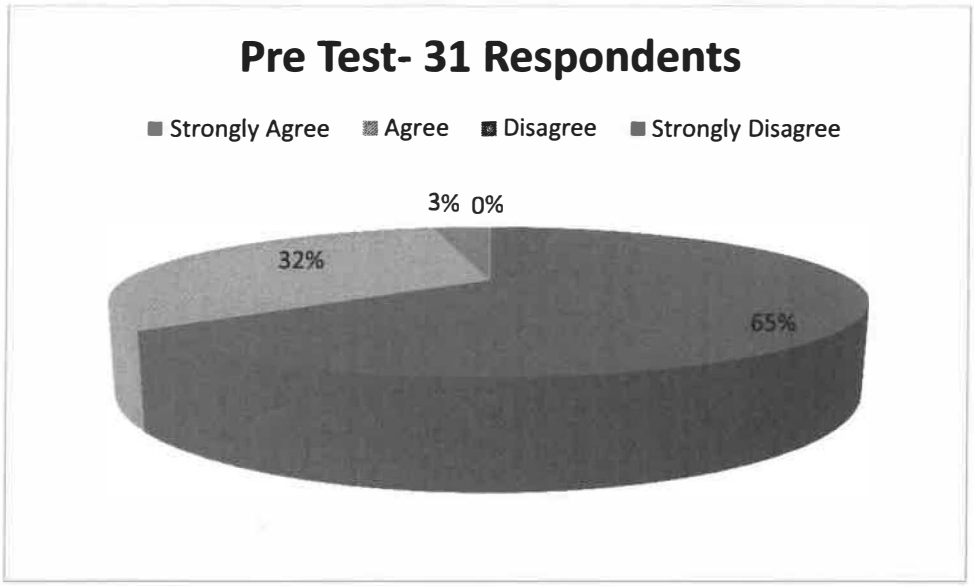
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	30	29
Agree	1	2
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

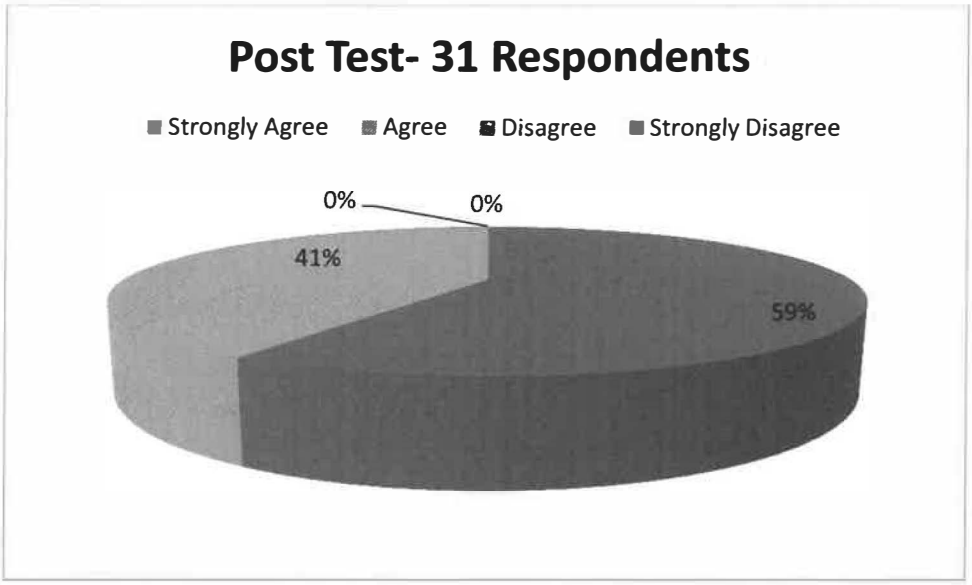




Q4. No one should be discriminated against as it relates to participating in the life, growth, and witness of the church.

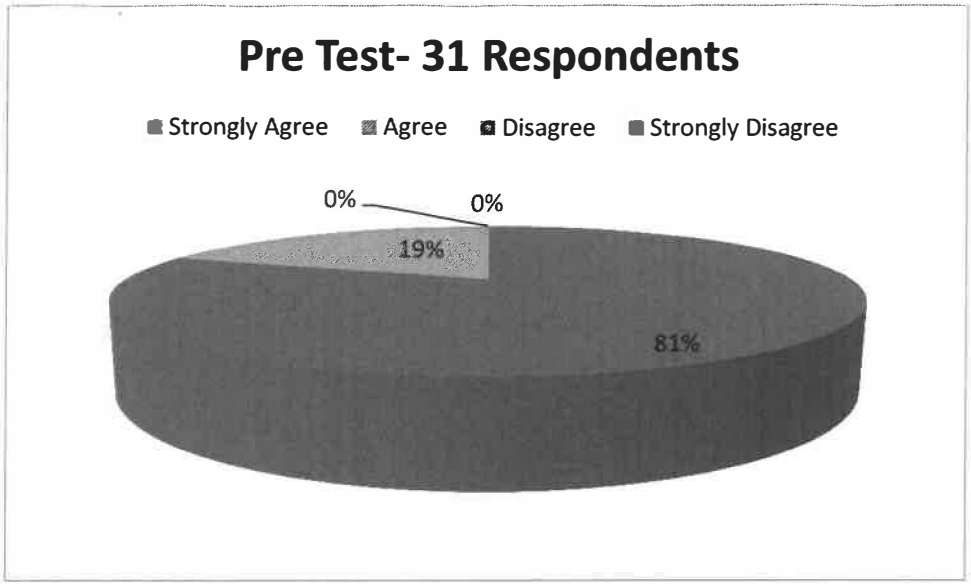
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	30	27
Agree	1	4
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

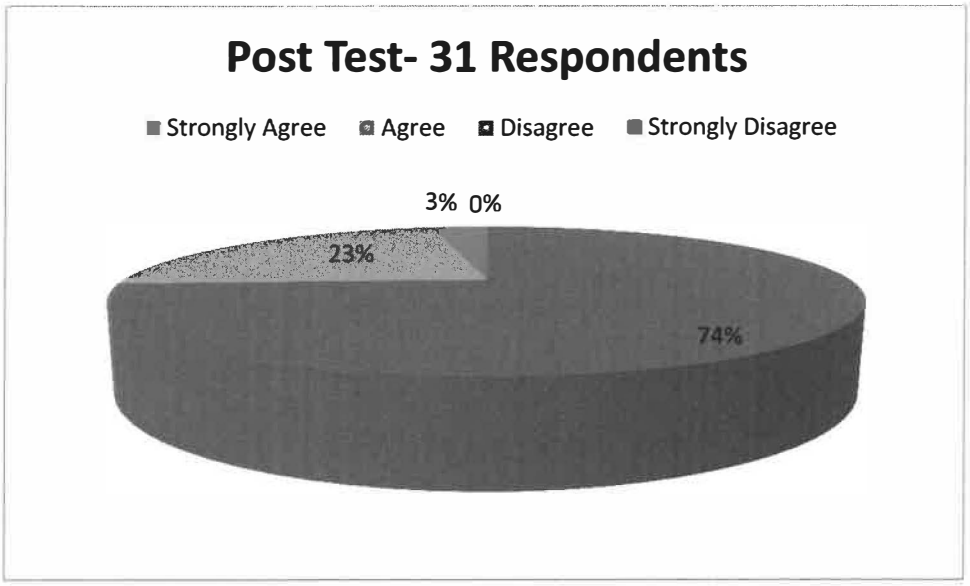




Q5. The church has become a revolving door for the community that it serves due to individuals leaving the church because of past church hurt experiences.

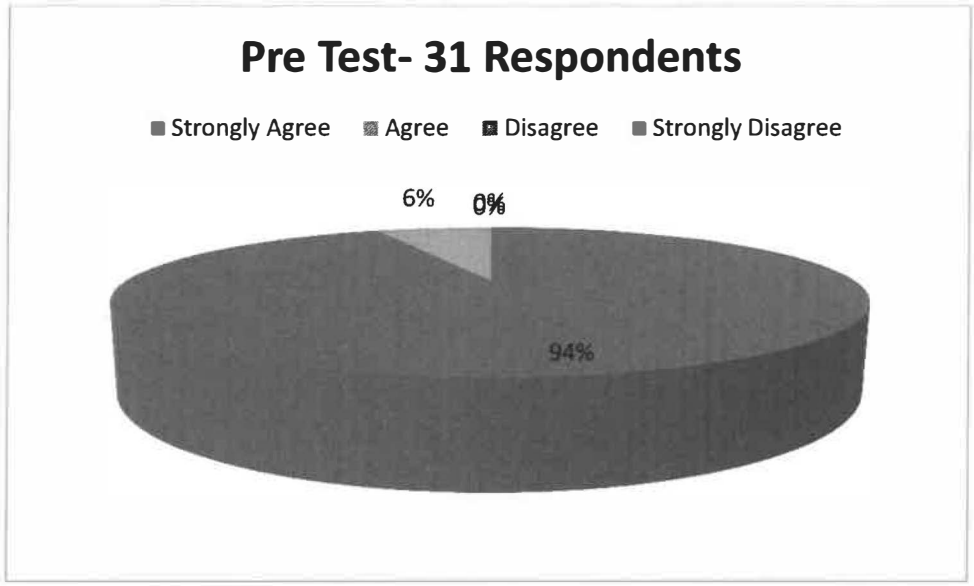
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	20	17
Agree	10	12
Disagree	1	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

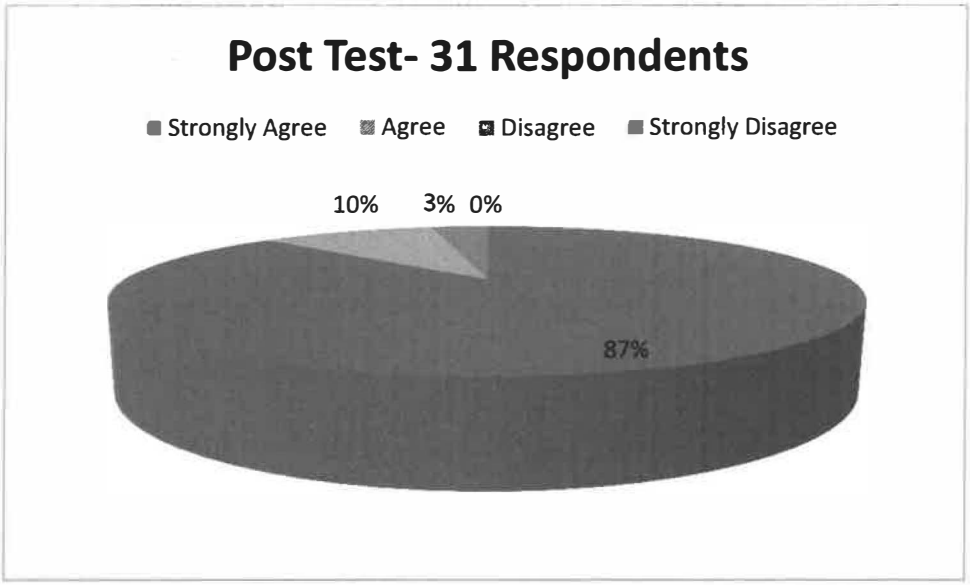




Q6. The church should be more of a reflection of the diverse neighborhood in which it serves.

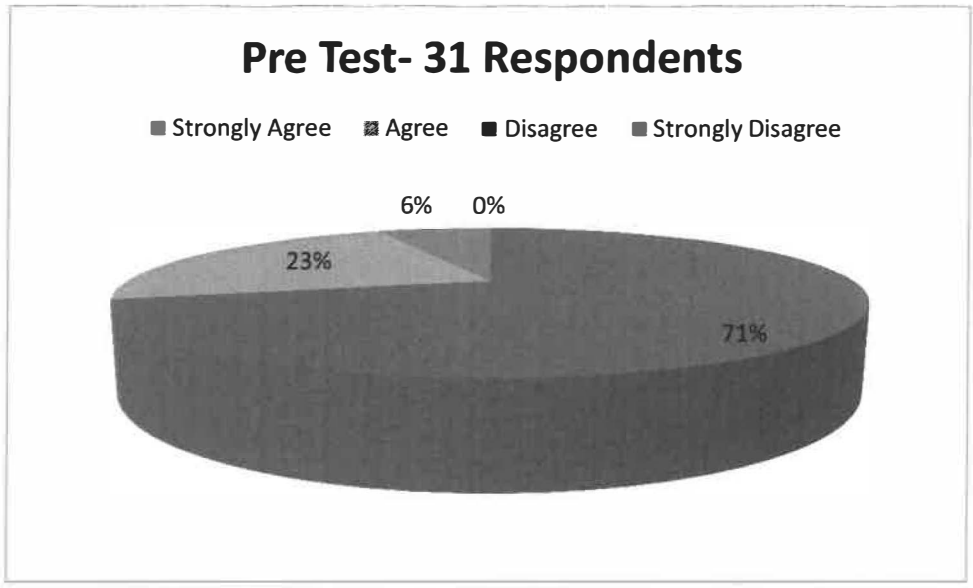
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	25	23
Agree	6	7
Disagree	0	1
Strongly Disagree	0	0

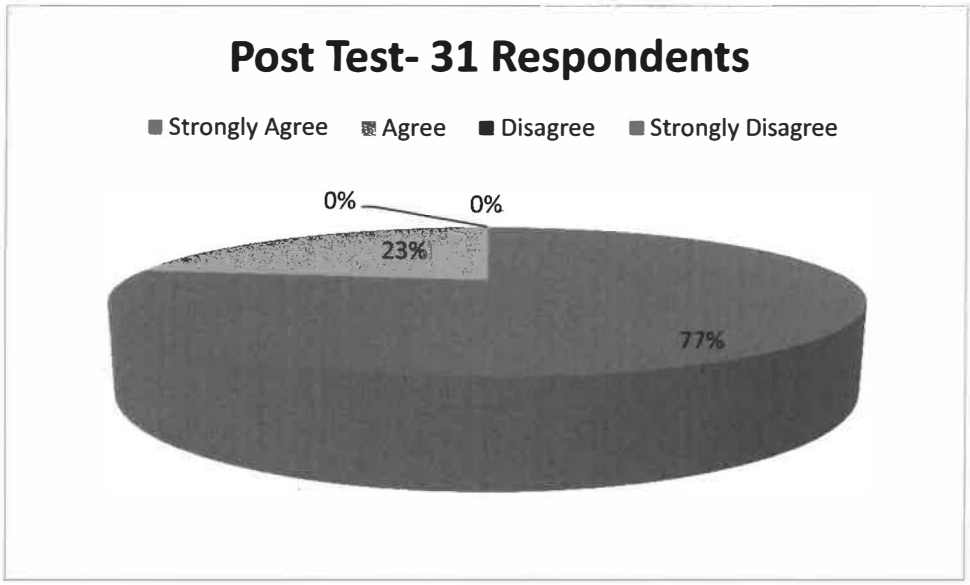




Q7. The church, including the pastor, staff, leaders, and members, should display friendliness to all persons that attend it's services.

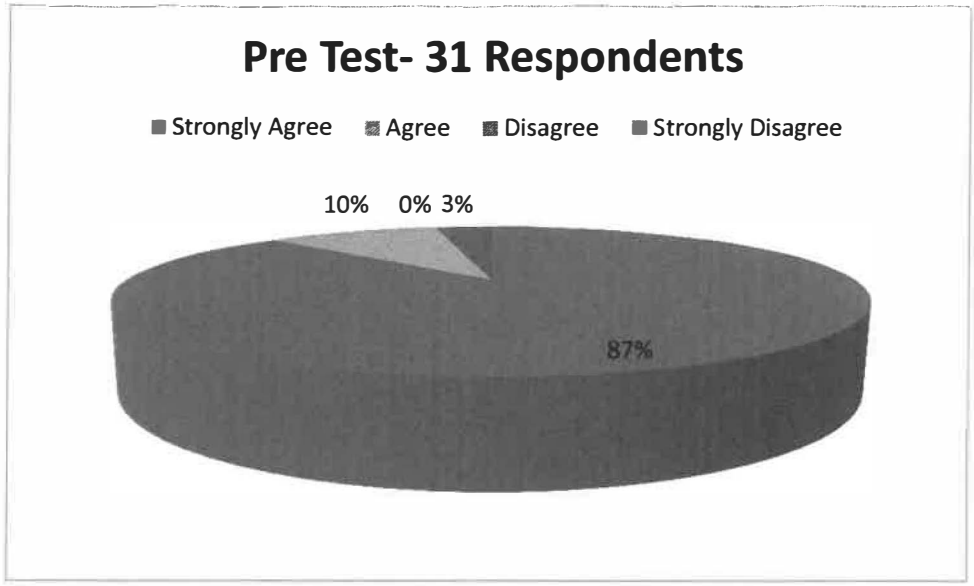
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	29	27
Agree	2	3
Disagree	0	1
Strongly Disagree	0	0

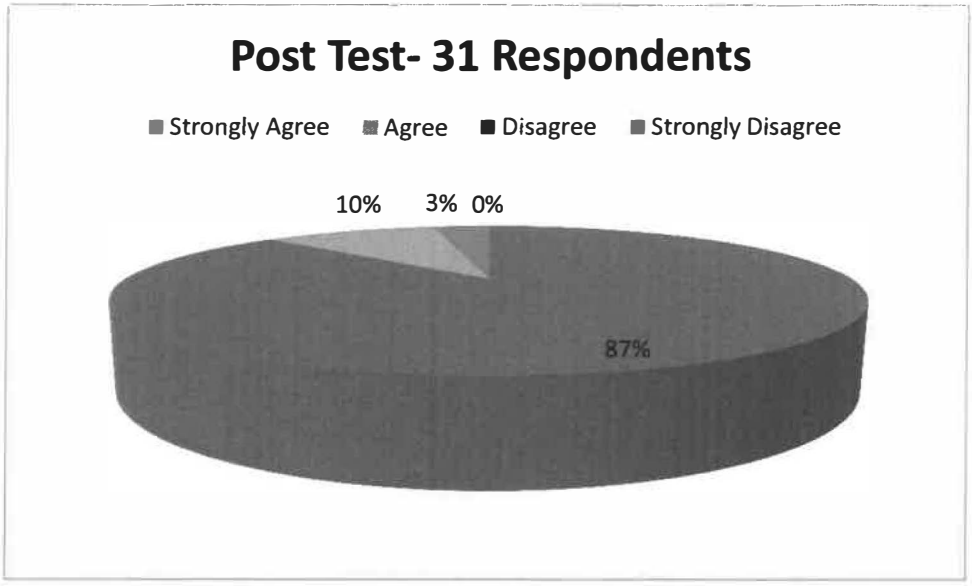




Q8. The pulpit should not be the place to articulate your personal biases against certain genres of people.

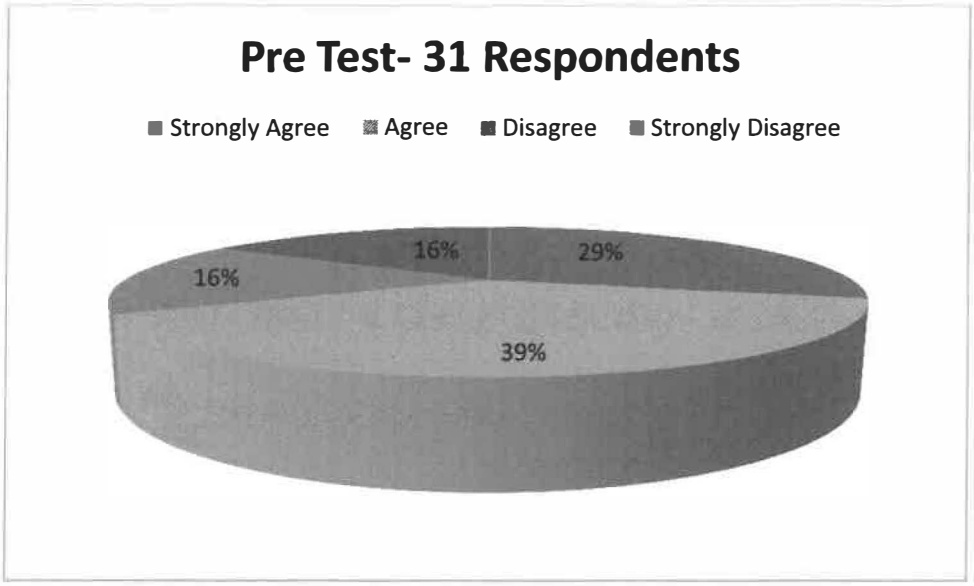
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	22	24
Agree	7	7
Disagree	2	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

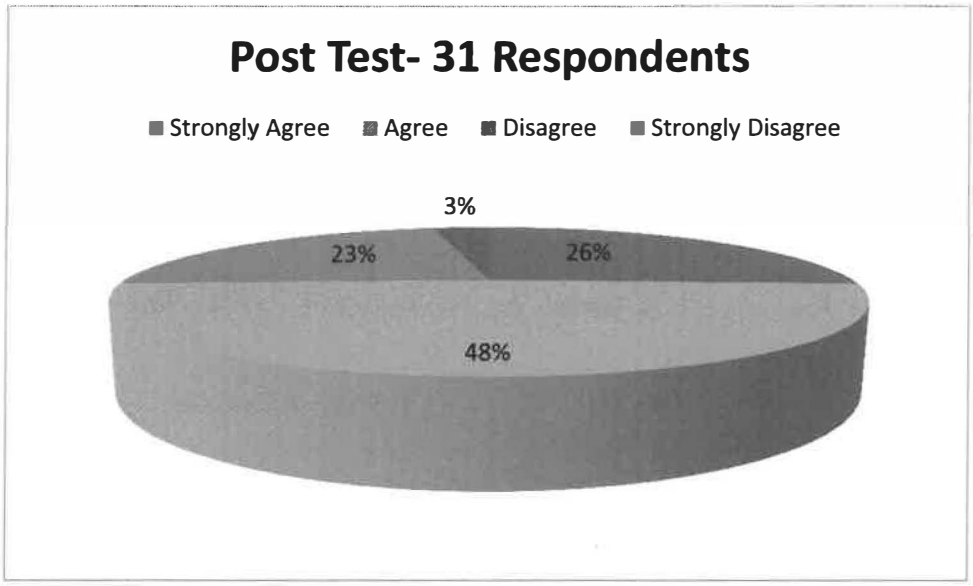




Q9. Should the church be a place where you would invite your families, friends, and neighbors to attend?

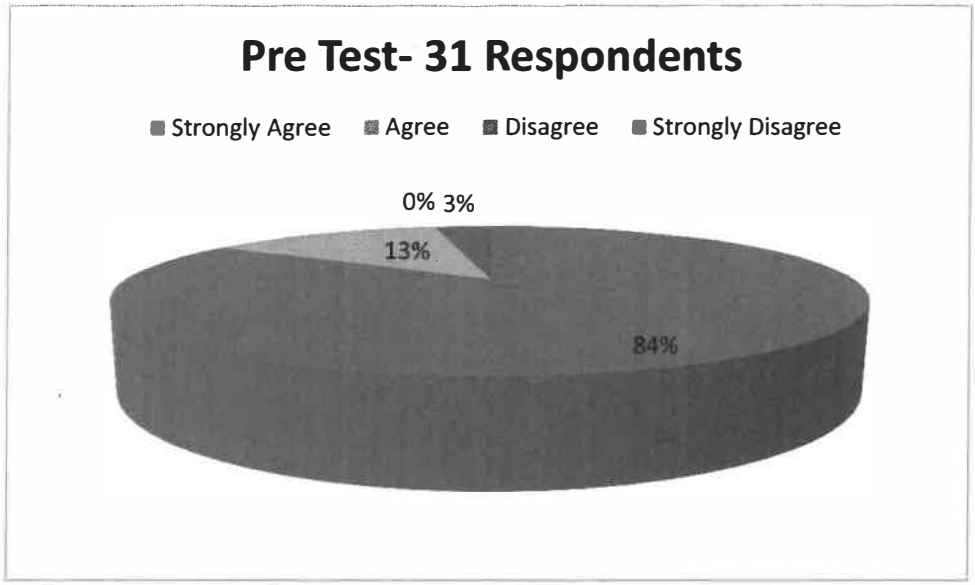
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	27	27
Agree	3	3
Disagree	0	1
Strongly Disagree	1	0

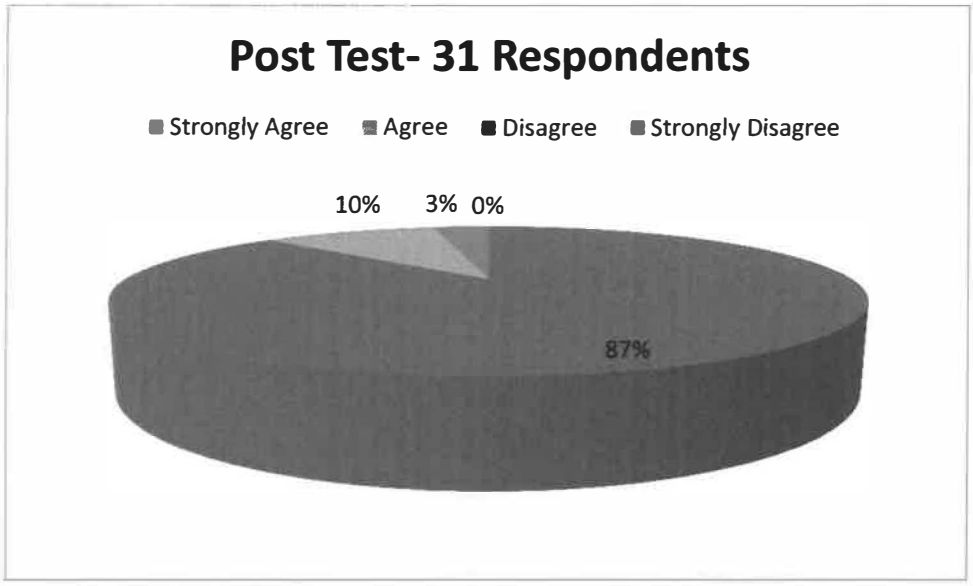




Q10. I often times experience social oppression in the community and spiritual oppression in the church.

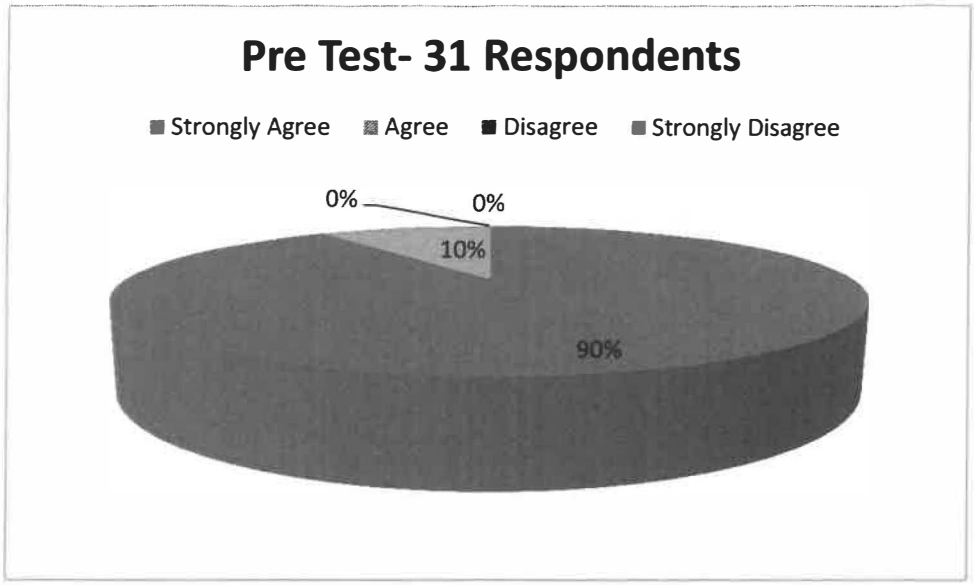
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	9	8
Agree	12	15
Disagree	5	7
Strongly Disagree	5	1

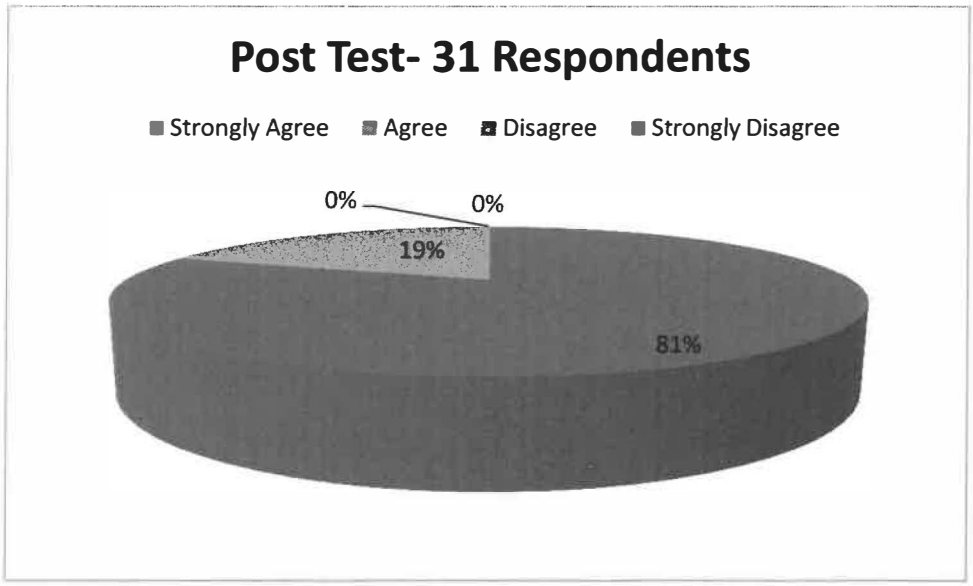




Q11. The church should not be a place where a person should experience negativity and mistreatment.

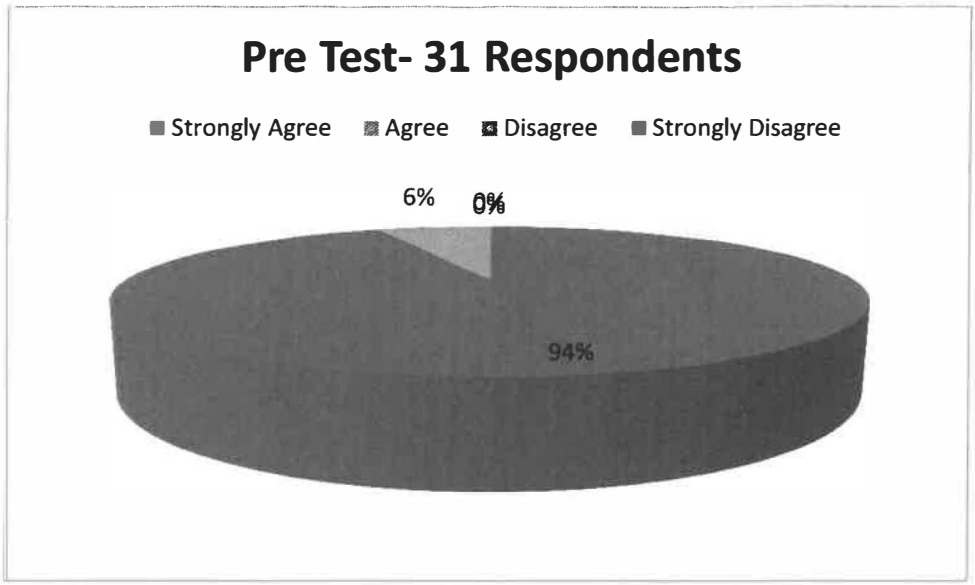
	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	26	27
Agree	4	3
Disagree	0	1
Strongly Disagree	1	0

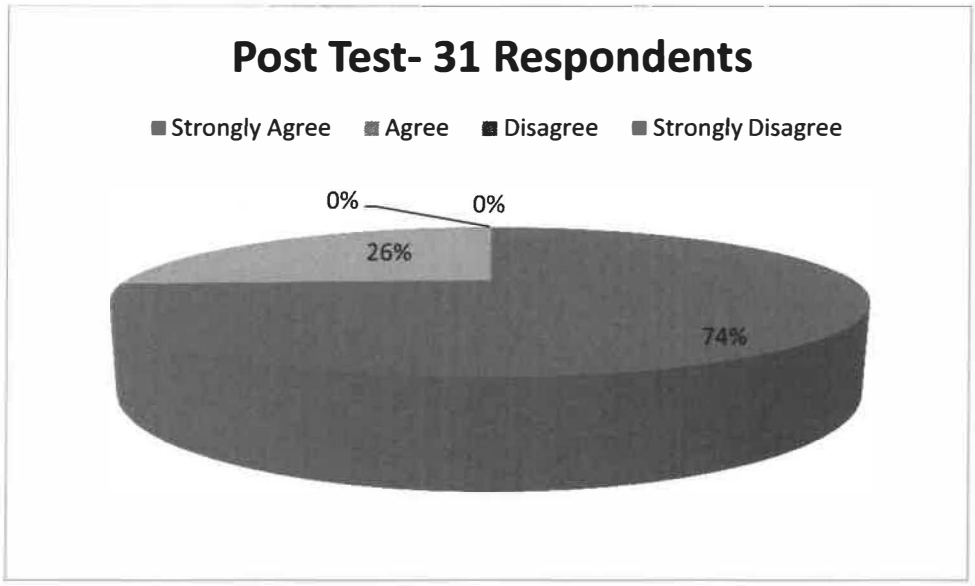




Q12. There should be some teaching and preaching that educates people on cultural diversity and cultural awareness.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	28	25
Agree	3	6
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0





Q13. The church should signify excellence as a five-star service rating and not anything less.

	Pre Test	Post Test
Strongly Agree	29	23
Agree	2	8
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

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